

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Laurence J. Capellas

"I laugh now because they're talking about the schools being more independent. I was a pretty independent guy. In fact, my district superintendent told me, he says, 'You know, Larry, you keep bending that school code, and one of these days you're going to break it. I'm going to get you!' That was said in a friendly manner, of course."

Laurence J. Capellas was born August 27, 1913 in Hakalau, Hawai'i. His father, Eugene S. Capellas, was a teacher and principal at Hakalau School for forty-two years and was instrumental in organizing the Hawai'i Education Association, a forerunner to the present Hawai'i State Teachers Association. Capellas's mother, Eliza Reis Capellas, taught at Hakalau School for forty-one years. Both parents retired after forty-nine years as educators. Capellas and five of his eight siblings also became schoolteachers.

Capellas attended Hakalau School, St. Mary's School in Hilo, and St. Louis High School in Honolulu, graduating in 1931. He went on to the University of Hawai'i, where he was a 1935 graduate of the Teachers College.

After teaching vocational agriculture at Waimea High School on Kaua'i for eight years, he was named principal of Pa'auhau School on the Big Island in 1943. One year later, he became principal of Pa'auilo School.

In 1946, Capellas moved to Pāhala High and Elementary School as its principal and remained there until 1959, when he was named principal of Hilo High School. Seven years later, he moved up to the Hawai'i district office as secondary curriculum specialist.

Capellas retired from the Department of Education in 1977 after a forty-two year career. However, he continues to be active in educational matters, serving as president and board chairman of the Hawai'i County Economic Opportunity Council and board member of the Hawai'i Education Association and the Hawai'i State Retired Teachers Association.

He still lives in Hilo with his wife, Elsie Schumacher Capellas. They raised two sons, Frederick Eugene, who is an instructor at Sacramento City College, and Laurence Eugene, deputy chief engineer for the County of Hawai'i.

Tape Nos. 21-3-1-91 and 21-4-1-91

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Laurence J. Capellas (LC)

January 30, 1991

Hilo, Hawai'i

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Laurence Capellas on January 30, 1991, in Hilo, Hawai'i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, let's begin. Mr. Capellas, why don't we start by having you tell me where you were born and when you were born.

LC: I was born in Hakalau, Hawai'i. My father was principal of Hakalau School and my mother was a homemaking teacher. In fact, she was the first homemaking teacher in the [territory] of Hawai'i. (She) taught sewing and cooking.

WN: And your birth date?

LC: I was born on August 27, 1913. And went to school there, in Hakalau. But I skipped the fifth grade, so when I finished the [eighth] grade, I was only twelve years old, and it made it very difficult for me to go to high school at that early age. Hakalau (School only) went up to the eighth grade. You had to take an examination to go (on) to Hilo Intermediate School. Those (who) didn't pass (usually) went to work on the plantations. During that period, we had (some) students in the eighth grade who were seventeen years old because they didn't promote them unless they were able to accomplish the work in that particular grade. I thought I should repeat the eighth grade under a different program, (and selected St. Mary's School in Hilo. St. Mary's was in the process of adding) a ninth grade and then a tenth grade. We were a big family, there were nine (of us), plus (a) cousin, and (an) aunt who lived with us, (as well as) a nephew. (I could thus) save (some) money, instead of going to Honolulu to (a boarding) school . . .

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Let's back up just a little bit.

LC: (All right.)

WN: We'll get into your going to St. (Mary's) a little later on. But what I want to do first is talk about your parents. You were talking about your mother. What was her name?

LC: My mother's name was Eliza Reis. She had come (to Maui on a sailing) boat from Portugal (in 1886)—not exactly Portugal, but from Madeira—when she was just a little girl. It took three months to come over from Portugal. They came in a sailing boat. Just to get around the horn of South America took them two weeks because the winds buffeting the small boat. When they got to Brazil, they were supposed to get supplies and be given shore leave, but there was malaria or some kind of a sickness (on shore) at that time, and so they were not allowed to leave the boat. On that same ship people died and were buried at sea, babies were born, people got married (during) the three months (of the trip).

(My grandparents landed on Maui as Grandpa had signed) a contract with Pā'ia Plantation. My grandmother was a dressmaker, and my grandfather was a leather craftsman. He made ladies' shoes and mens' boots, (saddles and harnesses). My people were not farmers from the old country. *De Reis* means "of the king." They were connected with the (Portuguese) government over there and dealt with the upper-(middle) class. (My grandparents custom-made this group's) clothing, shoes, (as well as) harnesses for their buggies.

WN: The grandparents you were talking about just now were your mother's side?

LC: (Yes, on) my mother's side. My great-grandfather's name was Sneider, so I (do) have some Dutch blood in me. We're Dutch Portuguese (on my mother's side).

WN: And where was your mother educated?

LC: My mother was educated in Maui at the seminary and . . .

WN: Mauna'olu [Seminary]?

LC: (Yes), that's where she (developed) her sewing and (cooking skills). At age sixteen she passed her (government) teachers' examination.

WN: Sixteen?

LC: (Yes), and started teaching (right away). My dad's case is very similar. My dad came over on one of those small sailing boats. His father was an engineer in the old country. My great-grandfather was a Frenchman, so I have Portuguese and French blood (as well). When they came to Maui, my dad's father, also under contract to the plantation, was able to do surveying and laying out the irrigation ditches. He was promoted rapidly on the plantation.

WN: This is HC&S [Hawaiian Commercial & Sugar Company]?

LC: (Yes, I believe the area is now part of HC&S. My father's) family lived in Waikapū, and my mother's folks lived in Pā'ia. They both went to one-room schools and got their education that way. Then my dad was tutored by a Miss Nellie Crook, her brother was named Laurie Crook, and that's (how) I got my name Laurie. But in the (birth) records of the state, my name is Laurence. My family calls me Laurie. Friends call (me Larry). I had a brother who was much bigger than I was, so he was Big Cap and I was Small Cap (when we were attending the University of Hawai'i).

WN: Now, your father, his name was Eugene?

LC: Eugene S. Capellas.

WN: And he was quite an educator also, wasn't he?

LC: (Yes), my dad and mother both taught school for forty-nine years and would have made their fiftieth except that the war [World War II] was on and my dad wanted to retire and run for the [territorial] senate. (He served) forty-two years (of his career) as principal of Hakalau School. He just stayed in that one school and liked it.

He started teaching in Maui up at 'Ulupalakua (for seven years) and then was sent to Hakalau (as a teaching principal. Hakalau) was a one-room school made of one-by-twelve (lumber). All of the desks were handmade. (The school yard covered) half an acre. By the time (Dad) retired, (Hakalau School and park consisted of) seven-and-a-half acres of land. (There were) about 600 kids, going all the way up to the tenth grade. But as the plantations began to consolidate, (the parents moved away and) the school was finally closed. Four other principals followed (my father), including my older brother [who] also was principal at Hakalau at one time.

WN: So was your dad principal when you were going there?

LC: Yes, my dad was the principal when I was going there. He was the first teacher, as I said earlier. The youngsters were beginning to increase, so he asked for a second teacher, and that's when my mother came (to Hakalau School).

WN: Your mother came over from Maui?

LC: From Maui, (yes). They (knew) each other (while) they were studying (to be teachers).

WN: What caused your dad to come from Maui to the Big Island?

LC: I guess it was the promotion.

WN: Oh, I see.

LC: And I guess my whole family were kind of adventurous. They left their old country to come here. In fact, when I started teaching I started over in Kaua'i instead of on Hawai'i.

WN: So how was it having your mother and your father at the school that you go to?

LC: Well, I had both of them as teachers. My dad taught math. I think that (our) family, especially (the) three boys, suffered a lot more than the other kids in school when it came to (corporal) punishment. (We got our share of paddling.) And if some kid was paddled or scolded (by my dad) and (the kid) was bigger than I, (this boy would pick a fight with me after school). So as a kid I was in all kinds of fights. I had (to form) my own gang and whatnot for protection.

WN: Did your father treat you any differently?

LC: Well, I think, as far as punishment, (yes), he made sure we got our share, so there was no favoritism there. But he believed in education as the most precious thing that you can give to your children. So all of us, except two of my sisters, six of the nine, anyway, (ended up in) the field of education.

My younger brother, Donald, was at the University [of Hawai'i] as a sophomore, and then the war [i.e., World War II] broke out and he was taken—I guess all the ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] and the National Guard were mobilized. He (was selected to take) an examination for officer school. (He) was interested in the air force. He (was sent) to California and was (rated as) an outstanding flyer. (The air force) made him stay back and teach, which made him angry. He wanted to go to the front. Well, they finally sent him there, and he was shot down a couple of times in the war. He didn't go into education, (but worked with the airport comptroller). One of my sisters was fascinated with cosmetology, hair dressing, and (opened a beauty shop. A third ended up as a supervisor in communications.)

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, we were talking about your experience in Hakalau. What about your house? What kind of house did you folks live in?

LC: (We lived in) the principal's cottage, and as our family grew, they kept adding on and adding on to that same house until finally it was housing fourteen people, and that was kind of interesting. We would eat on a long table that was specially made. My dad (had) made it up in the school shop. It was about three feet wide by probably twelve (or more) feet long. (Dad) was very punctual. We had to be home by a certain time, because they were going to serve (at six o'clock P.M.). You (had) better get home if you wanted to (get your share).

WN: Who cooked?

LC: My mother cooked, my sisters cooked. Later on, I learned how to cook. It was a good thing, too, because when I went to the university I had to cook for (the first) three (years). In my senior year I worked in the school cafeteria for two hours a day. We'd joined the NYC—the National Youth Corps—they only paid twenty-five cents an hour. I told the cafeteria manager, "I can't live on twenty-five cents; that's fifty cents a day, only two hours." I said, "Give me two meals, and I'll try to find lunch someplace." (I) had (to stay) healthy—because I was (involved) in athletics. (If so), you (have) to eat.

WN: How far away from the school did you folks live in Hakalau?

LC: Right on the campus. (The parents of some of my classmates) were aliens and had come (to Hawai'i) to work on the plantation. (The common vernacular in the community was) pidgin English. But my dad and mother (and the other teachers) insisted on the youngsters learning (to speak and write) good English. And we had some (students) that really (were successes). Dr. Elaine Kono, (who) was one of our graduates, (as) was her sister (Margaret, got to the top echelon in the DOE). Their family name (was Kurisu).

WN: And her sister is Margaret Oda.

LC: Dr. Margaret Oda, right. Those are just (a couple of) examples from Hakalau School. (Hakalau graduates for quite a period of time) more or less dominated the Hilo High School student body (government offices) and (in) their classes. My dad believed in pushing every youngster to do their (best). And he was very proud of them. (They were "HIS"—Hakalau Intermediate School—graduates.)

WN: Hakalau School, when you were going there, ethnicitywise, what was it like?

LC: (There) was a mixture of (races). They were kids from (all levels on) the plantation. (Sons and daughters of all employees:) the *lunas*, the office (workers, supervisors), bookkeepers, and (field and mill workers). All (employees' children attended), all nationalities, all types.

WN: Do you remember what it was mostly?

LC: I think it was pretty much a mixture. We had a lot of Hawaiian kids, we had Chinese kids, Japanese kids, I mean, of that extraction. And we had *Haole* kids, if we call 'em that. And there were Portuguese kids who—at that time, there was a kind of a differentiation. Because some of the Portuguese had come from the old country, and they were just farmers and not too well educated. But they (all) believed in trying to get their kids educated, too. So I think it was really a conglomeration of all nationalities, (all hoping to give their sons and daughters a chance to prepare for a better life).

WN: Did the kids treat you differently because of your father and mother?

LC: Only, as I said, the rascals, ones who got in trouble and got paddled (by my dad and then) would pick on me. So I had to fight my way. I got busted teeth, cuts on my head. (Chuckles)

WN: I was wondering if it was because of you, you know, that you were a rascal kid, or if it was because they'd be teasing you because of your father?

LC: Oh, I was a rascal, yes sir. I had my own gang. We would engage in sports with (teams from) Honomū or Honohina. There were (small) schools (within commuting distance). (Actually), there were probably close to sixty schools on (the) island (of Hawai'i). I (remember that) when I came (to Hawai'i as a fledgling principal), to Pā'auhau [in 1943], there were fifty-six schools, one about every five miles, or at each plantation. On the other side of the island, I guess it was about the same, (that is) in Kona and other (such) areas. (There was no) bus transportation. There were kids in school, when I was in Hakalau, who walked from (the) *mauka* (camps). That was about four miles (that) they (had to) walk to school. Some of them who really lived up in the forest line (would) come to [school] on horse or mule.

WN: Besides Hakalau Plantation, what other plantations . . .

LC: There was Wailea Plantation, which was (not a Big Five organization).

WN: Those kids went to Hakalau School?

LC: They went to Hakalau School. Honohina was part of Hakalau Plantation, and those kids also came to school there if they (lived) close to the (Hakalau) gulch.

WN: Yeah, my dad is from Honohina, but I don't know if he went to Hakalau School.

LC: No, (probably not). There was a school (at Honohina or Nīnole), which later was called John M. Ross School, and that's probably where he went to school.

WN: Nīnole.

LC: (Yes), and that's probably where your dad went.

WN: Living at home, you had a household of fourteen, what kind of chores did you have to do?

LC: Well, I took care of the garden, and we had chickens, of course, and I would raise one or two pigs a year. One we'd kill at Christmastime, and one we'd kill in June or at the end of the year. And we would make Portuguese sausage and pickled meat. The fat from the pig was boiled [or] fried (to make) lard. We had big crocks—maybe five-, ten-gallon crocks—and we'd put the meat in there then pour the hot lard over it. So if you wanted to eat sausage or some kind of pickled meat you had to dig down in there with a long iron prong and pull out (the item you were going to use).

WN: Did the lard preserve the meat?

LC: Right. In the beginning we didn't have any (refrigeration and ice was not always available). We (therefore) would salt the meat, dry it in the sun, or smoke it. My dad was a sportsman. He was a good baseball player, (a runner), and (a) tennis player. In fact, he won some trophies playing tennis. He also loved to hunt and fish, so he'd take us along. From the time we were ten years old, he taught us safety procedures (when) using a shotgun. As a kid (of) about thirteen I (first) went pig hunting (in the forests) above Hakalau. Whatever (wild game) meat we (caught was stored in) iceboxes. Eventually we had refrigerators.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, we were talking about iceboxes.

LC: (Yes), and so later on when refrigerators were made, we had two refrigerators. One only for wild game, and the other one, of course, was for the regular necessities of the house—vegetables and fruits and so forth. We raised a lot of fruits—papayas and avocado pears—and we raised some vegetables. I raised some Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, (carrots, beans, cabbage, tomatoes and lettuce). I like to farm.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: We were talking about farming, then, you like to farm.

LC: (Yes), and I learned from my mother and dad about animals. When we killed the pig, she explained about the heart and the lungs and how they operated, and the spleen, all the

different parts, you know, (such as) the kidneys and the brains of the animal. (We also raised) chickens and rabbits. I wanted to become a veterinarian. But (while) I was at the university, when I was a sophomore, my mother was ill, and so I had to forget about that and go into teaching. (Since) I had most of the courses that were needed to go into (vo-)ag, I decided I better try that field. (Thus I became a vocational agriculture teacher.)

WN: Is that what you majored in?

LC: I (was enrolled in) [University of Hawai'i] Teachers College. I took all my sciences and so forth (as electives), whereas the other ag students who were going to become teachers were in the (college) of sciences and then took education courses as electives. I did it the other way around.

WN: You did the education first.

LC: (Yes).

WN: Let me back up just a second.

LC: Go ahead, go ahead.

WN: Let's get to UH [University of Hawai'i] a little bit later.

LC: (Yes, yes).

WN: Okay, let's talk about—from Hakalau you went over to St. Joseph School.

LC: (No), it actually wasn't St. Joseph School at that time. St. Joseph School was a girls' school, St. Mary's was a boys' school. But by the time you got through with St. Mary's—they had typing, bookkeeping, and all kinds of subjects—those students that left the eighth grade went to work for different companies around town and some went to plantation (offices). It was kind of commercial-type school, but they were (planning) to add a ninth grade and then a tenth grade. I was (actually) interested in the sciences. (To save money to help with educational costs), I worked on Saturdays on the plantation. I was just a kid, but when we first went to work (at age twelve) we got fifty cents an hour, I mean, a day, and we worked ten hours. That's five cents an hour!

WN: Doing what?

LC: Hoeing. They call that *huki lepo*, where you pull the weeds and the grass all up on the (base of the) cane, (using a hoe. As I got older) I cut seed, *pulapula* they called that. And then later on I worked with mules. I had pack mules (with which) we would move flumes. Portable flumes (were used) in the cane field. (Later) I became (a) water boy, which was a prized job. (Chuckles)

WN: Why was that a prized job?

LC: Well, you didn't have to go (work with a *luna* standing over you). The sad part about (being

a water boy) is you had to carry all the *bentōs*, (or) the lunch (pails), from one place to the other. They [field workers] would have maybe about five breaks during the day. The first break would be tobacco time, because those guys—the immigrants—all smoked, (most rolled their own cigarettes). Then I'd have to move those lunch containers and everything else to the next spot where they would have lunch, and I'd have to take water to them. I had a pole and two buckets. And of course, the buckets were covered with some type of cloth, and you had about three stones tied to the end of the cloth to keep 'em tight over the water so no rubbish would get in. And then you had a long guava stick at the end of which there was a can (to make a dipper). That's what they drank from.

WN: They all drank from the same . . .

LC: Dipper, (yes). Well, they tried not to put their mouths on it, but then [they] spilled some all over themselves, kept them cool.

WN: How far did you have to carry the water?

LC: At that time, there were streams that were not polluted (on both sides of) the cane fields. And there were springs, too, in different places. It varied, actual running water or springs nearby the field (were the best).

After, as I got older, I went to the (head of the [Hawai'i]) County (to ask for a) county (job). (The man) was not called the mayor at that time.

WN: Chairman?

LC: (Yes), chairman of the board [of supervisors]. Samuel Spencer was the (person's name. He) was the chairman, (so) I went and asked him for a job. During the summer, the schools were painted and the cottages were repaired. He said, "Well, you're kind of young to work."

I said, "Oh, I can work." (I started working at age twelve years and nine months.)

WN: How old were you?

LC: I was sixteen. When I was fifteen I went to Maui and worked in the pineapple fields and (then) worked for the Baldwins, taking care of their polo ponies. I took care of (the mayor's) garden, too. Early in the morning we'd clean the stables. In the afternoon we'd rub down the horses or wash (them down). I spent (that) one summer on Maui and then I started working for [Hawai'i] County at age sixteen.

I did all kinds of (odd) jobs. (The work crew was either) moving cottages or moving schools. It was a very interesting type of work. We had to (carry) big (moving) planks on our shoulders. (Since) I (had) played barefoot football, I (used) my shoulder pads (under my sweatshirt). Otherwise, my shoulders would get all raw (from) carrying those big planks. And then [in the summer of 1934] I started digging cesspools for the county. So when I graduated from the University of Hawai'i [in 1935], I (figuratively) had my diploma in my back pocket and I was (back at) digging cesspools. There were no jobs. It was (during the) [Great] Depression.

- WN: So you worked for the county two separate times, then. Once when you were a young sixteen-year-old, and another when you graduated from UH.
- LC: No, I (just) kept right on working every summer. I had to save money to go to school, (and after graduation, to survive).
- WN: I'm just curious now, here's a sixteen-year-old boy who was able to go to the county chairman, who was equivalent of the mayor. I mean, was that a common thing?
- LC: (No, but) I went to his home. I was a gutsy guy when I was a kid. In fact, my dad didn't even know (what I had done. The county chairman, however, was a friend of my father.)
- WN: And you were living in Hilo at the time?
- LC: No, I was (still) living in Hakalau.
- WN: And Sam Spencer lived in Hakalau?
- LC: In Hilo.
- WN: Oh.
- LC: He lived in Hilo, which is the center of the population. I went to see him (on) a Saturday afternoon after work. Somebody was going to Hilo from Hakalau (and I got a ride). It took an hour and a half to go to Hilo in those days, (all we had was) gravel roads. We didn't have paved highways, and (Hilo) was about fifteen-and-a-half miles (away). There were about ninety turns all along the way from Hakalau to Hilo.
- WN: The train was running by then?
- LC: The trains were running, yes. But I didn't have any money to ride the train.
- WN: So you were working---first you were working plantation for fifty cents a day.
- LC: That's when I started.
- WN: For you to go to the mayor or the chair, you must have really wanted a better-paying job. What was going through your mind at that time?
- LC: Well, I had graduated from the tenth grade of St. Mary's. I was the valedictorian there. I wanted to go to St. Louis [College] in Honolulu, because my brother had gone. In fact, he and I were the only ones that didn't go to Hilo High School out of the (eleven) in the family (house). (My brother Eugene and I) both went to St. Louis. Of course, (in) those days, to go to Honolulu, we'd (travel) steerage, it only cost us seven dollars (each way). We wouldn't go downstairs in the steerage (section) because those Filipino (men) that were down there would be smoking Tuscany's. Whoa, that would make you sick.

(Laughter)

LC: We'd sleep up on the ropes up on the deck.

WN: This was on the big steamers?

LC: No, they were all (like) the *Hualalai*, they're medium-sized boats. *Haleakala* was a single-propeller boat, and boy, that one was really something. The others were twin screws, weren't so bad, they were easier riding. And those days, when you got to Honolulu you could catch a trolley for ten cents. So from the wharf up to St. Louis, that's all it cost.

WN: And St. Louis was, by then, where it is now?

LC: Right. It was 1929 when I went up there to school.

WN: The campus must have been fairly new then?

LC: Oh, yes. I broke a lot of rocks there. In fact, being in and out of mischief, I was sent to work (many) times.

WN: Tell me about your sports involvement from Hakalau School to St. Louis.

LC: Well, when I was in Hakalau I played barefoot football, and I was (also) interested in track. We didn't have a basketball court, we just had a dirt court. So we learned to play basketball outside. We had a different type of basketball. The seams were out, so (the ball) had this ridge all around the outside of the basketball.

WN: Kind of hard to dribble?

LC: What the heck, you're dribbling on dirt. (WN laughs.) We didn't have any macadam. (The community) had teams. I played basketball for the Pirates, the Wailea Pirates, in a community league (after) they built a gymnasium down in Hakalau, the plantation built (it). I remember I couldn't buy (proper footgear). Teachers didn't get much in the line of pay. In fact, when I was going to the university, I think my mother was making about \$150 and she was an old-time teacher. My dad, as principal, probably made about \$200.

WN: A month.

LC: Of course, relatively speaking, things were not as expensive as they are now.

WN: Would you say you had a little higher lifestyle than, say, a plantation laborer?

LC: (Yes), but the (entire) plantation (was my territory or turf). For example, maybe on a day which was a holiday, in the morning I might be having breakfast at some Japanese boy's home, and then maybe lunchtime we'd be at some Hawaiian boy's home, and then in the evening maybe we'd be down in the Spanish Camp where they were making homemade soup and (Spanish) bread (in stone ovens). My mother had a hard (enough) time trying to take care of us without keeping track of us.

I remember as a kid, with my gang, we used to get in all kinds of trouble, but not

(necessarily of a) destructive (nature). The old Hawaiian policeman had an old Model-T, but he also had a horse which he would use to go and look for kids who were tardy or playing hooky and whatnot. He would call (our) house whenever there was trouble in the community and ask my dad, "Is Laurie home?" If my father said no, then he'd (go) looking for me and my group.

We did all kinds of things, having fun. For example, the plantation would cut cane, and they had mules to pull their cane cars up to where the cane was stacked. (At the end of the day) they'd leave the cane cars up at the tops of (a) hill, wherever they were cutting cane, so that early in the morning they could start loading those first and take the cane cars down to the flume, which was at the bottom of that tract of land. What we would do in the evening, especially on a moonlit night, we'd go up and we'd take the brake off the cane car, and we'd go riding down to the bottom of the hill, jump off (and go back up for another cane car). We also used to ride the piles of cane going down in the flume. That was kind of dangerous, too, because (we) could have gone right down to the mill.

WN: (Laughs) It was all downhill?

LC: All downhill, because the water had to carry the cane. That's why the plantations had their mills in the lower areas, near the ocean. They had to load the (bagged) sugar on (the freight) boats that came (into the bay. Two large) whaleboats, with the platform (in between, were used to take the sugar to the freighter.) Big cranes (located on concrete wharfs were used in the loading).

Another thing we would do [that] used to make trouble for the plantation (was that) we would go way up where they were harvesting cane, and we would jam the flumes, (especially) the main flume, where all the cane was coming in from different fields. We'd jam the main flume, and the cane would back up and the mill would have no cane (to grind). We (felt for) those poor guys working in the mill, getting (only) twenty-five cents an hour. (We felt) they needed a little break to smoke a cigarette or something.

(Laughter)

LC: Then we'd hide in the cane field and the *lunas* would come up on their horses, swearing, looking for us. They knew that it must have been my gang of kids.

WN: What did you use to jam up the flume, cane?

LC: (Yes), cane. We would get the big stalks and jam them in crosswise, and then gradually (the pile) would build up. And once it got really built up, then boy, there was a jam.

WN: Wasn't there a watchman or something?

LC: (Yes), there were watchmen. But we'd (make sure) the watchmen (were not in the area).

(Laughter)

LC: (We were active.) We played softball, we played basketball, we played barefoot football. (On

certain) days, (the entire) plantation (celebrated events) like Fourth of July. (After the speeches), they would have all kinds of races, and the kids would get awards and prizes. And so we kept pretty darn busy. Our life was fun.

WN: Barefoot football, for example, how organized was it? Did you have a coach or anything like that?

LC: Yeah, we had a coach. First we played by ourselves, and later on they had a coach.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

LC: I played barefoot football when I was at St. Louis. We had a team, the boarders (at the school. St. Louis doesn't) have a boarding department now, but (then) they did. I played (on the boarders' barefoot football and) basketball. I (was on) the St. Louis track (team). And I did the same at University of Hawai'i. But [at the] university I also played soccer. We were the champions in the state [territory]. At that time, the army had a team, Maui had a team, the Big Island had a team. Soccer was an intra-state (program). When I became an ag teacher, I had my own barefoot football team with my kids and got them into track, (basketball), and other (activities). I believe athletics are a good means of keeping a community together, keeping the school together, and (developing) good spirit. The main thing to remember is (that) they, (the students, have to) prepare for life. I was able to (help many) youngsters who normally would be getting into mischief by getting them into sports (or other school and community activities).

WN: Did it help with you when you were in school?

LC: (Yes), I think it helped me. I got rid of a (great deal) of extra energy (and helped me to meet people).

WN: When you went to UH after St. Louis, did you know pretty much that you were going to be a teacher?

LC: No, but as I said, I (had) wanted to be a veterinarian. The first two years of college, according to consultants, (are) preparatory (and exploratory). That's why I tried to (enroll in some) science (courses). When I first graduated, I started teaching vocational ag (as an extra assignment). I (took) about eleven or twelve kids who (would be labeled) MRE now, mentally retarded kids. (They agreed to help at the school) farm. (In exchange the ag students) tutored them—taught how to read and do whatever math we thought they could accomplish. We got (to help) them get through school. (During) the eight years (that) I was at Waimea High School, (this project kept slow learners from dropping out).

I first went to Waimea High School as a teacher on June 18, 1935. And I had to recruit a class who would be (the nucleus of those) taking vocational ag. (During that first summer these students worked with me) on the plantation. I was learning (some things) along with them, because Hakalau was not an irrigated plantation, although I'd had some (irrigation) work (in a class) at the university. We (also) planted alfalfa for (the Waimea Plantation Dairy and kept records on their cows' milk production).

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Before we get into Waimea High School, let me just ask you about UH. What was the [Teachers] College curriculum like? How did it prepare you to become a teacher?

LC: Well, we had all the various (required) education courses (as well as some electives). When I was a junior, I (worked) with Dr. Fred Armstrong, who was the head of the vocational education section. I did my practice teaching with (the) vocational ag (classes) at Waipahu. I (was invited and) joined the Alpha Beta, which was an honorary ag society. (Besides being fun-loving, I) thank God I had (been given) some intellect and was able to (buckle down), do my school work and get good grades. (I guess) that (is) how I got into that honor (society).

The first three years in college—actually about two-and-a-half years—I was having a lot of fun just enjoying my college life. But when I became a junior, I decided that I better start getting ready for life. (During my senior) year I stayed with Dr. (Fred) Armstrong, and he made sure that I (hit the books and improved my grades). When I graduated I was one of the sixteen Real Deans, which was an honor. I don't know if they still give that (award. You must be) doing well (scholastically as) well as socially and (engage) in other (worthwhile) activities around the school.

Out of the eleven (graduates) in our (vocational agriculture) class, I was the first one to be hired. In June, I started (the) ag [program] in Waimea, Kaua'i.

WN: Did you look for a job teaching, first?

LC: (Yes, but) there were no (teaching) jobs.

WN: There were no jobs?

LC: There were no jobs because of the [Great] Depression.

WN: Oh, I see.

LC: The regular teachers were only getting about ninety dollars a month, (as their salaries) had been cut back. But the ag program was (still) being pushed (by the Big Five).

WN: How much did you get digging cesspools in 1935?

LC: (I don't remember offhand but) it was (at least) twice (the pay) you would get (working) on the plantation. When I got the call to go to Kaua'i, I didn't have any money (and had only been on the county payroll a few days). I had (had) to use (the) last (of my savings) to come home on the boat from Honolulu. My dad told me, "I'll loan you some money." He loaned me twenty-five dollars, and I bought a ticket to go to Honolulu, steerage. I got to Honolulu, I called my sister who was a teacher and told her I needed some boots to go to Kaua'i. I still had my---ROTC clothes, which I could use as an ag teacher. And I got a little hat (that) my dad had which I thought would keep me (from getting sunburned).

I talked to Mr. (W. W.) Beers when I got to Honolulu, and he told me, "You get a car and

get down to the wharf. Put the car on the boat (before four o'clock) because we're leaving tonight at eight o'clock." Well, he had gotten me the ticket to take me to Kaua'i, (so I was able to just manage financially).

WN: Who's Mr. Beers?

LC: W. W. Beers was the head of the vocational (agricultural) education (section) in the vocational (education division of the DPI [Department of Public Instruction]).

WN: For the territory?

LC: (Yes). He worked for the school department [i.e., Department of Public Instruction, later Department of Education]. I (then) went to see Percy Deverill, (the vice president of the Bank of Hawai'i) who was (my) track coach at the University [of Hawai'i], and I told him that I had to get a car but I . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay, we're talking about Percy Deverill.

LC: (Yes), so he called the Ford agency, made arrangements for me to get a car. I had to pay \$300 down. At that time, a brand-new Ford cost about 900 bucks, imagine. (Percy said that the agency) had (a) car (that was repossessed). I told Percy, "I don't have \$300."

He said, "I'll loan it to you. You pay me back when you can."

I said, "Oh boy, with the salary a teacher gets this could take me forever."

But he said, "Don't worry about it." So I picked up the car, signed all the papers and (then) went down to put it on the boat. After I paid for the passage for the car to go to Kaua'i, I had five dollars left. Imagine going to a strange place, not knowing anybody, (and having no money to boot).

(As a sophomore) I had played barefoot football on Kaua'i. (At Christmastime a group of) university kids (had been invited) to Kaua'i to play. (While there) I went to (George) Crowell's home. He used to play football at the University of Hawai'i, and I knew him, because at the university I worked in the locker room to take care of the football players—polish their shoes, wash their clothes, get their uniforms ready, and then help them on the days of the games. (During the conversation I asked George, "Why do you want to live in a deserted place like this, Waimea? Look at all the red dirt around here. This is the last place in my life I'd ever want to go to.")

(He said, "Well, if you change your mind and you want to come to Waimea, I'll always be here.")

WN: What's his first name, Crowell?

LC: George Crowell.

WN: George.

LC: Yeah, his brother was the chief of police.

WN: Oh, Edwin?

LC: Yeah, Ed. And so imagine my embarrassment.

(Laughter)

LC: Well, those days they took all the gasoline out of the car before they put (it) on the boat. So the last five dollars I had, I had to buy gasoline and figure some way that I was going to eat (before my first paycheck). We (drove) to Waimea, and I met the manager of the plantation. This was a Saturday morning. I had to go to work on Monday. So I took Mr. Beers back to Līhu'e, because he was going to catch a boat back to Honolulu. And then I went back to Waimea, and I went to see Crowell. He says, "Oh, I thought you (said you) would never come back here, no matter if it was the last place on earth."

So I told him, "Eh, I'm sorry, but I need your help." So I told him about not having any money or anything.

He said, "Okay, I'll take you down to the hotel, Waimea Hotel, and see if they can give you credit till the end of the month."

And I said, "I'm not going to get much money. Remember, I start working on the eighteenth. I'm going to get (paid for only) twelve days." Actually it turned out I only got fifty dollars for my first paycheck. (At least) I had (access to) at least one good meal a day (at the hotel) and the rest (of the time I would have to make do).

WN: So in those days there was no any kind of room and board for teachers or anything like that?

LC: No, no, but there were cottages, so temporarily I was assigned to a cottage which had been occupied by some *wahine* teachers. It was a two-bedroom unit. I tried to get as familiar as I could with the area before I started work on that Monday morning. In those days, the plantation started early in the morning. (At) five-thirty (A.M.) you had to be down at the assembling area. That's how I started my career, as an ag teacher. And I stayed there (for over) eight years. I had some darn good (students whom it was a joy to teach).

WN: Like what was your opening pay, do you remember?

LC: In those days, you got \$100 for the elementary school teaching positions and you got \$110, I think it was, for (teaching at the) intermediate (level) and \$120 (as) high school (teachers). Only ten dollars difference (between levels). We didn't have a single-salary schedule. That came in later when my dad and (others formed) the HEA [Hawai'i Education Association].

(While on Kaua'i I was elected) president of the Kaua'i Education Association. That's when we got (the) single-salary schedule (passed along with many other benefits for teachers). We had no teachers' union. (Being an ag teacher) I (was paid) twenty dollars more (per month than regular teachers) because we worked twelve months (a year, making my total salary \$140 a month. In the beginning) I got ten dollars (additional in the form of) car allowance.

(Within two years) I had sixty-seven boys (in my vo-ag classes. Besides vo-ag) I taught gardening and those eleven mentally retarded kids that I worked with. They all did all right, except (for) one kid. He was a devil anyway, and he came from a broken home and had a hard time. He went to jail. The other (ten) kids did all right. In fact, one guy (became) a small contractor, (operating a tractor (rental agency. He also worked) for (the) Gay and Robinson (plantation). But each of those kids found a place in life, (and all of us were better off as a result of the program).

WN: Most of them stayed up Kaua'i?

LC: (Yes, most of them) stayed on Kaua'i. One kid moved to Honolulu, he's the one that ended up in O'ahu Prison. I found out (about this) from the other kids.

WN: So you said you worked twelve months. What did you do in the summer months?

LC: Summer months? Well, we had the school farm, (the garden areas and the) two cane contracts. (The Fayes had the) Waimea Dairy. (During the summers) I helped with the testing of the (cows). The milk samples (were sent) to Honolulu. The milk (production of each cow and other information was logged). This was a special project that the university (was doing for the Dairy Herd Improvement Association).

WN: Was there a Future Farmers of America?

LC: We (organized) the first one, (the) Hans P. Faye chapter. (It was a) good chapter. Actually, one of our boys, Stevenson Ching, became the first officer in the national organization. He was the first vice president of the (national association) of the Future Farmers of America, and he made trips to the Mainland (for meetings). Stevenson worked for the (USDA [United States Department of Agriculture]) after he graduated from Waimea [High School].

WN: So prior to your coming to Waimea, there was no FFA chapter?

LC: No, (as I said we) started the first one. When I went to Waimea, (it was) an intermediate school, (but that September) the tenth grade (was added), then the eleventh grade, (finally) the twelfth grade, over a period of three (short) years. When I first went there, the school (itself) was playing barefoot football. The only high school on the island was Kaua'i High School. But Kapa'a and Waimea had been selected as possible growth areas and (were scheduled to) add the tenth grade, eleventh grade, and twelfth grades. By the time I left Kaua'i [in 1943], there were three high schools, the (oldest being) Kaua'i High School.

I had (students who came) all the way from Mānā to Lāwa'i, which is quite a distance. (As I said), I had sixty-seven boys. I couldn't possibly (visit their home projects each month). But I did get to visit those with pressing problems each month and was on call. (Agriculture

teachers) had long hours. We worked (on) Saturdays (and) Sundays (because of the size of the school farm. (The piggery) had about thirty (breeding) sows. We had about a thousand birds, (200 ducks). We had to make enough money to make it worthwhile to operate a farm. And we had (a small) orchard and we produced vegetables (on about four acres of prime land).

When the war broke out, I was given a 4F rating. When I tried to get into the armed services—although I had a wife and two kids—the only place that would take me was the coast guard. All they were going to do, I found out later, was (to give me a) uniform and (I would) do the same thing (I was doing in the OPA as a volunteer in the home guard. One of my duties was visit) the farms to see whether they (actually need to) be buying (imported feed for their livestock. I would approve the amount of feed that they could buy) and ask them to (market surplus) animals (and birds) that were not producing. (We concluded that I could be serving the government more profitably as a civilian.)

But in the meantime, I only had a four-year teaching certificate. So I had to save my vacation (days to) go to summer school every (third) year. Because summer school was six weeks, but I only (earned two) weeks of vacation (per year. It was tight. Mr. W. W. Beers insisted that) I go back home (to Kaua'i) halfway through the (summer) session (to check on the farm and other projects). When I went to the university (summer school) I took eight credits instead of six (so as to earn the sixteen credits needed).

WN: For summer.

LC: (Yes), for the summer (session). So it took me three summers to get my fifth-year certificate.

WN: Now, back then, to be able to teach, you didn't need a fifth year?

LC: You did.

WN: You did. So how did you get the Waimea job?

LC: Because (the DPI was) going to start the fifth-year (requirement) the following September.

WN: Oh, I see.

LC: I was kind of grandfathered in. The ag teachers were kind of grandfathered in.

WN: Oh, but you still had to go back to get your certificate.

LC: Right.

WN: Did all the teachers have to do that, the teachers that only had a fourth year?

LC: Yeah, they all had to or at least make an effort.

WN: Or else they would have gotten . . .

LC: I guess—I don't know what would have happened to them. I think if they worked for a certain period they didn't have to go back, but, later on when the new pay scale went in, it was to their advantage to go and get these extra credits.

WN: Oh, I see. So those that didn't get it stayed at a lower pay scale.

LC: (Correct).

WN: When you graduated from UH, it was only about four years after the [Territorial] Normal [and Training School] had moved over to [University of Hawai'i Teachers College].

LC: (Yes), I graduated 1935.

WN: So you were probably one of the early college of ed students?

LC: (Correct.) I went there instead of (through) the (field of) sciences and took (education) credits because I figured that I could always fall back and become a teacher if I couldn't become a veterinarian or whatever.

WN: Okay, so prior to your coming to Waimea, was there an ag teacher like what you were?

LC: There were some all over the state. But at that time, they were trying to put the ag teachers into high schools so that each rural community had (a higher level) program. Hilo High, for example, had an ag program, even though they were (urban). But they had the kids coming from all the way from Hakalau and all the way to Volcano, 'Ōla'a. When I was in Honolulu in my last summer school to get my fifth-year certificate, I ran into one of the district superintendents, and he told me, "Hey, Larry. (A DPI committee is doing interviews this week.) They're looking for principals."

I said, "Ah, I don't want to be a principal. I'm happy where I am, even though I work twelve months."

He told me, "No, no, go ahead, just for fun." And he was one of those people screening. Webling is his name, Gus Webling. He was the district superintendent in Honolulu. And so just for the fun of it I went to take the examination to become a principal.

WN: And you passed, I presume?

LC: I must have, because right after I got home in August, I got a letter from the school department offering me 'Ulupalakua School, which made me laugh because my dad had been there.

WN: Oh, yeah. Maui, yeah?

LC: (Yes), Maui. But I couldn't go because we had such a big farm program going and a very active Future Farmers set up. We had state presidents of the Future Farmers, we had the Hawai'i Planters—they didn't call (them) State Farmers like they do now. We had American Farmers, which was something nationally recognized.

By the way, Senator [Spark] Matsunaga's (brother), Andy, was one of my students. He and another kid, Susumu Miyashiro. I had some real top-notch youngsters. Let's see, I'm trying to remember (a) name. (Oh yes, Hideo) Nonaka from Hanapēpē. (After graduation) he ran some restaurants, and he controlled (all) Hanapēpē Valley's produce. In fact, when he was (still attending) school at Waimea, he would be delivering vegetables and fruits (to the cafeterias from 'Ele'ele to Kekaha. Hideo) and another boy named Mori were twenty years old. They came back to school, the two oldest ones that I had. I was twenty-one. (Hideo) had a hard time with his reading (as he) was an immigrant. We helped him (improve his reading). The math (was) no problem. He became a Hawai'i Planter and American Farmer. We had some really good (students).

WN: Now, this farm that was set up, what was . . .

LC: (The Waimea High agriculture farm) was set up on plantation property under an agreement between the plantation manager and me. And he and I, together, borrowed \$1200 to buy all the materials to build the pigpens, (fencing, and plumbing supplies). The interesting thing is that the university [Agricultural] Extension [Service] used to come over there and check us out and talk to us. For example, my kids told me that the pigs that are outside in the red dirt up near our school—our farm was away from the school—they didn't seem to get scours, which was a diarrhea that the (nursing) pigs would get. That was because of the iron (oxide) in the soil. We tried it out and it worked fine. And then later on here comes a bulletin from the university suggesting that you use red dirt rather than painting the teats of the sows with iron oxide.

We built a special type of chicken coops so that each bird had its own little section. We (kept) records. If the bird wasn't laying, we called 'em "flapper" hens. We butchered them and sent 'em to market. (People) came (to visit and) copied our pens. Pretty soon here comes a bulletin from the university showing a new type of house, which was something that was developed by guys like Joe Harper and (another ag teacher and I). The three of us developed that house ourselves (and they copied it to a "T.")

WN: Mm hmm. So was it profit-type setup?

LC: The farm had to make a profit. We used that money for our ag (students) to (go on excursions and to attend conventions). We paid (students) that worked on Saturdays and Sundays.

WN: So like, people would buy the produce and . . .

LC: Oh, (yes). Every Saturday morning. On Friday afternoon we'd take two animals—two pigs—to market. But we take 'em down to a place called Pākalā, where Nakamura—(the) father (of one of our students helped us) butcher. We had taken orders (during the week for Saturday delivery). We sold turkeys (and) chickens that we dressed. We even sold chicken manure—twenty-five cents a bag, imagine—to people that wanted to use that as fertilizer.

We sold the feed bags. The feed came in white cloth bags. The kids would pull off the strings and then shake 'em all out good, and we'd sell those. I forget what we got (each bag), probably twenty cents. We made enough money on those little things to buy new sets of tires for our trucks. We had a small truck and a bigger one—one ton-and-a-half and a small half-

ton truck. We bought everything ourselves with money that we made. (There was income also from the) two cane contracts . . .

WN: Cane contracts, meaning you folks raised cane?

LC: We raised cane, yeah. We had our own. We harvested one field this year and then harvested the other field the next year. The kids would fertilize, (weed and) irrigate (the cane).

WN: So when did the students have time to take other classes?

LC: This was done on Saturdays, the kids would come to work. And we had—oh, I know what you're talking about. Those MRE kids, three of them would spend a week down at the farm, and then the next week three other ones would go down to the farm, and they would check and see that things were okay. So they weren't with us all the time. They'd be down there. And then we had two boys every day go down. We had bicycles for these kids if they didn't have a driver's license, or (the older boys would) take the small pick-up truck and go down. The farm was about a mile from the school. It was next to the dairy, the Waimea Dairy.

Which reminds me, we would get extra skim milk from the dairy, which they gave us free because I did a lot of work for the dairy, too, on my own time. I don't know how I put all those hours in. We took the coconuts (from an old copra farm next to the dairy). The dry coconuts (were) split in half (and tossed into) the pigpens. The pigs would scoop out all the (coconut) meat. Then we'd take the husks and throw 'em out in the sand, and the sun would dry them. We used that as fuel for our big cooker. We had a big cooker. Of course, during the war, we were hauling garbage—or slop or whatever you want to call it—from the army camps around there, which helped. Our pigs were really fat and so was (the) big (watch)dog that we had down on the farm.

The (board of health) sent Dr. [Joseph] Alicata (to) check our farm (from time to time). We got a clean record for our pigs and so forth. I think the reason is we had that sand, nothing but sand, and that (sand got hot in the burning [sun]). Our pigs didn't have parasites. And because it was so dry there, we'd wrap bags around poles that we put in the ground and oiled (the bags) so the pigs (could) rub themselves (and condition their skin). We tried a lot of things that were innovative.

WN: Now, did you have that kind of—seemed like you got a lot of support from . . .

LC: The community, (yes). Every June we would have a father-and-son banquet, at which time we'd present awards for the best (home) project, the best record keeping, (and) the outstanding (young farmer). We didn't buy anything (for the banquet). Rice (was raised) on Kaua'i. One of my students had (seven acres of) rice. In fact, about three (others) had rice (projects). Taro we got from one of my students who was raising taro. The salt we got free from the Hanapēpē salt flats. Nonaka and his gang would get all the oranges we needed, so we had an orange drink at the luau [*lū'au*]. And the coconuts we had on our farm [were used] to make the *haupia* or *kālolo*. The kids caught all the fish, especially the kids around the Pākalā area. They were right next to the ocean. So we didn't buy a thing, nothing.

WN: It seems like a lot of these kids already came from farming families.

LC: Well, it was a plantation community.

WN: So actually, from your side, what was there to teach?

LC: Well, we tried to get (them) ready for life, number one. We tried to get them to select—we mixed our own feed, which was a balanced feed. We used fish meal from the tuna packers to give us our calcium and the other elements that we needed in there. From the rice mill, we got the rice bran. The *kiawe* beans the kids picked, and we paid 'em so much a bag, and we ran it through the hammer mill. We had molasses from the plantation. And then we took pigeon peas that we planted along the plantation irrigation ditches—so it just grew wild—we harvested those. We put 'em on our roof of our pigpen to dry. We didn't dry them fully, we just wanted to cure them. We ran that through the hammer mill. So we had a balanced feed, using only Hawaiian feed, and we got (a territorial) award for the feed that we made. (We demonstrate) that our feed was good. We had a sow who had eleven babies, and we fed these piglets, up to a certain age—I think it was (for) six months. We weighed them in the [territorial] contest, what they called a ton-litter contest. And our pigs—the eleven pigs—averaged about 215 pounds. Anyway, we competed with the top hog raisers in the whole state [i.e., territory]. We came in number three, competing with commercial (piggeries). We mixed our own. These kids still had to have help in a lot of areas, like in bookkeeping and (learned by doing).

WN: Like math.

LC: (Yes), and we had our own (bookkeeper) who was elected to handle all the books. You (must) remember (that) we had a farm worth about \$15,000 by the time I left there. We had our own tractor and two trucks. Then we had all these animals and the vegetables and the field crops (that) we produced. The pigpens were right below an irrigation ditch, and so when we needed water to flush out our septic tank, we'd open the irrigation ditch gate, run it right through, clean out the septic tank, and we ran (the manure) out and into big banana patches and (and field crops). We (also) raised pumpkins and tomatoes.

WN: Now, you said you got a lot of support from the community. What about support from school administration?

LC: I had two principals there, McLaren, (who is) still alive.

WN: That's Dallas?

LC: Dallas [McLaren], (yes). And then Joe Griswold, but Joe Griswold has passed away.

WN: Griswold.

LC: Yeah, he came over there from Konawaena [High School] to Waimea [High School].

WN: Did they support you?

LC: (Yes), they did. They knew what kind of a tough job ag teachers had. But you see, in those days I think that schools were really more interested in progress that students made. For

example, if a kid came into your class, and at the end of the year he hadn't gained anything in the reading test or in the math test, then something must be wrong. And in those days, I would blame the parents for 10 percent of the kids' lack of progress. The other 90 percent was the teachers' fault. Now—I tell you, I hate to say this, but it's the truth—if I were teaching (today), I think I would blame (some of) the parents for 90 percent of the fact that the kids are not moving, because of (this) interference rather than assistance. I would take 10 percent of the blame (for the) kids who were really not in school to (learn).

WN: So what has changed all of these years for that to happen?

LC: Well, I think the mores have changed, (since) I was teaching. On Kaua'i, that was kind of a missionary-type island, Miss [Bernice] Hundley was a very strict district superintendent [i.e., supervising principal. The title was later changed to district superintendent.]. You never saw teachers going into the bars, and you never saw teachers dancing the hula in public or running around half nude. And of course, we didn't have TV, which I think contributes a lot to the problems that we have. We didn't have wheels. Now these kids all have wheels, running all over the place. And of course, we didn't have the (many) problems with drugs. The only drugs that we had were probably (with) alcohol more than anything else. And I (believe) our newspapers were not as interested in trying to publicize (the [bad] things happening in our communities). Anything bad (gets a great deal of coverage). For example, if some public official gets into some kind of trouble, the person is hounded and (in many cases almost crucified).

WN: To amend what you said, maybe it's 90 percent parents and the whole society at fault, rather than just the teachers.

LC: Right. I think the teachers have a hard time.

WN: So you're saying, then, that before—back when you were teaching in Waimea—the teachers had the biggest impact on the students.

LC: Right. The teachers had a big impact, and the parents cooperated. I had to go to the homes (to visit the students' projects), and so I talked with the parents. And if a kid wasn't doing too well, we'd talk about how we could help their son or their daughter with the problems that they had. Then try to (determine) what their (son's) ambitions were, what they were (doing), and how we could help them. I think that that made a big difference. Now, you don't see teachers going into the homes.

The only place you see that is (in) our (Community Action) projects. HCEOC, Hawai'i County Economic Opportunity Council, (has) a dropout program. We have a counselor in (each of) five (high) schools. (The school makes a list of) those (students) that have missed ten to twenty days of school, are getting two Fs or three Fs and so forth. They assign these kids to (our dropout counselor). We (take) a hundred kids, (for example), from Hilo High School. Our own counselor works with them, goes to the home, talks with the parents (and the youngster), and the parents and the kids (make a commitment to correct the problem. All agree that) there (is) no misunderstanding. Two years ago—I (haven't seen) this year's record yet, but two years ago we saved ninety-(eight) of those hundred kids. The counselors at Hilo High School were so happy, they gave an award to our (dropout) counselor for the work that

the counselor had done.

And I think this is the problem now. I think the teachers' union protects some poor teachers. I would say that 75 to 80 percent of our teachers now are darn good teachers. They're trying hard. The others—the other (15 to) 20 percent—I don't know (about). And they don't (or can't) help the kids.

WN: Now, back in Waimea you had a principal, of course . . .

LC: (Yes.)

WN: . . . and then you had the district superintendent.

LC: (Yes.)

WN: Okay. Now, if you wanted something done, who would you go to to get something that you wanted?

LC: You'd have to go to the principal, but we also got from the (DPI's) vocational education program.

WN: Which is territory-wide?

LC: That was territory-wide. Now our trouble, too, with the DOE is [it is] just too bulky—too big—and there are too many (steps to go through to get things done). We make a budget (at the) HCEOC (a Community Action Program). I'm the president and the board chairman. We make a budget, and we (include) certain trips (and other expenditures for the fiscal year). We have an executive committee that can (make interim changes each month). (The Board) meets ten times (during) the year. If we want to spend (discretionary) money on (a) project—like (for) Dr. Goldberg, (our energy researcher). He needed \$8000 to bring this car from Europe—from Germany—over to Hawai'i and (on to) Washington (D.C.) and New York, where (it was on exhibit). This car, which ran on hydrogen, (was of interest to scientists wanting to conserve fossil fuel). We (made) a decision (to bring it to the USA). We figured (how to finance the project and instructed Dr. Goldberg to go ahead).

If I have to go to Honolulu or George has to go to Honolulu for some meeting or he's got to go to the legislature, he just tells the comptroller to make his arrangements. And when he's ready to leave his ticket is there and he goes. (He reports to the board of directors each month.)

But when I was in the DOE [Department of Education] I started a project. After I left Hilo High School [in 1966], I worked in the [Hawai'i] district office, and we started a project called Huki Like. *Huki* is to pull, pulling together as one. And we took dropout kids from schools in Hilo. (The project site was at) Hakalau. In April everything was set and ready to go (come September). The school [i.e., DOE] personnel department had to go to the state personnel department. First the district, then the school, then the state. I got so (angry with the lack of progress in hiring staff), that on one of my trips to Honolulu I went to the state Department [of Education] to find out from state personnel where this project was. Here were

these kids, ready to go. The schools had agreed, the parents had agreed, the principals had agreed. The teachers that were going to run the project were handpicked and ready to go, and they still hadn't been processed. What kind of nonsense is that? The whole thing is top heavy, that's about the easiest way I can explain.

WN: Was that the case back then [when LC began teaching]?

LC: No, let me give you an example. We had about two acres of land when I first got there [to Kaua'i, in 1935], which was later on going to be used for building (additions to) the Waimea High School. The principal said we could use (the land in the interim). (There were) two old cottage-type classrooms that he said we could use. So I went to the plantation and borrowed (a) mule and a plow and brought (them) up to the school. I was there after school, plowing this place, getting it ready for (gardening). When school would open we would have a place for our (new) garden (for) elementary school students. (While I was plowing), here comes the boss, W. W. Beers. He never used to tell you when he was coming, he'd just pop up. And he told me, "What the hell are you doing?"

I said, "I'm plowing this field. And when I get all set I'll come in with the rotor-type plow and I'll soften it all up and get it ready. And then when the kids come they're gonna figure out—part of their math—how big an area they're going to use and plan this whole thing. In the meantime, I will have planted some seeds in seed beds, like tomatoes and so forth, because they would be about this big, ready to transplant so the kids would get a quick start."

He said, "This doesn't make any sense." He says, "Come with me!" He went down and he told the principal, "I'm going to take this guy with me." We went to Lihu'e, we went to Garden Isle Motors. He told the head of the Garden Isle Motors, he says, "I want the Ford tractor and the disk plows and so forth, things that go." He said, "I want them delivered to Waimea High School tomorrow," which was a Saturday. This was, I think, a Friday afternoon when I was getting the place ready. He wrote a purchase order, gave it to the head man, and that was it! The next morning, they called me up and told me, "We'll be there at one o'clock." Brought the tractor in and everything else. There was no monkey business. Man, today you'd have to go see the governor, you'd have to go see everybody in the legislature, you'd have to try to convince somebody in the school department. It's ridiculous!

WN: Was Miss Hundley involved at all?

LC: Miss Hundley? Oh, yeah, but he had already stopped at her office in the morning and said that he was going to visit the ag men.

WN: Now what about—okay, W. W. Beers was in Honolulu.

LC: Honolulu, yeah.

WN: So he was under the superintendent [of schools] . . .

LC: Right.

WN: . . . who was Oren E. Long at the time.

LC: Right. And Oren E. Long let him run his own show. That's the kind of guy he was, Beers. He was the gruff type of guy. He stood for no nonsense.

WN: So the buck stopped with him?

LC: Oh (yes), he had to be the one who supported us. But you know, the way we operated (then) and the way they operate now is altogether different. For example, we bartered with the cafeteria. We had a big stone wall, and we planted the whole thing with lima beans, the baby lima beans. And because the war was on, she [cafeteria manager] was getting different kinds of (surplus) milk products, and she couldn't use (some). So I told her, "I'll give you one bag of lima beans for one box of your milk—powdered milk," which (we) would then soak (our) scratch feed in. The scratch feed would swell up. And in the late afternoon, this fresh-soaked feed (was fed to the laying hens). That was something (the birds loved and [they] laid more eggs).

We (tried various tactics to improve) production. The lights (were turned) on early (in the morning to give laying hens a longer winter day). We didn't always succeed (in our efforts to increase production), but we succeeded enough times to make it pay.

WN: So there was no hassle in terms of making money then from the farm?

LC: No, no. Well, we had to make money. I don't know how else we could have done it. We were not going to sell sausage and sweet bread as fundraisers.

(Laughter)

LC: To me (doing) that (is) ridiculous. We tried to give somebody a dollar's worth, (not beg for donations).

WN: Let me change tapes.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 21-4-1-91; SIDE ONE

WN: Tape two of an interview with Laurence Capellas on January 30, 1991.

Okay, so we were talking about Waimea and the fact that you enjoyed, pretty much, a lot of latitude in terms of getting things that you wanted at that time.

LC: Right. At that time, I told you that I (had been) offered (the principalship at) 'Ulupalakua. So I asked (the DPI) to send me a university student who was taking ag. I had been there seven years now, actually seven-and-a-half years.

WN: At Waimea?

LC: (Yes, at) Waimea. (The DPI) sent Ikeda, (a) young (U of H ag graduate). He worked with me the whole (school) year (1942-43. The DPI offered me Pā'auhau School. (To accept the) principal(ship meant that) I would leave in August. The war was still on, 1943.

WN: So you didn't want to go 'Ulupalakua?

LC: I couldn't. I didn't want to leave that farm and (have a green) ag man (take over such a tough assignment). Our (FFA) chapter (had been) named the top (Future Farmer) chapter in the [territory]. I (had been sent) to the Mainland (in 1939 to chaperon four Hawai'i delegates—namely:) Stevenson Ching, who was (first) vice president (of the national association of the Future Farmers of America); Kongo Kimura, who (was president of the Future Farmers of America in Hawai'i [and who] later) became an ag teacher; and Eugene Inamine [who] was (the top) public speaker (and came) from Lāna'i. (The four of us) went up (to San Francisco) on a (large ocean liner. There were no commercial planes operating between Hawai'i and the Mainland.)

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

LC: As I said, when I went to Kansas City (to the annual Future Farmer convention. Dr. Armstrong sent a young man) who was still a student (to substitute for me). I was gone for three weeks altogether, because the boat (trip) took five days going and (five days returning. On the Mainland) we had time to visit San Luis Obispo—one of the best agricultural colleges in the nation—and the World Fair on Treasure Island in San Francisco Harbor.

WN: Was this a convention?

LC: (This was the national Future Farmer) convention in Kansas City.

WN: I see.

LC: Our public speaker, (Eugene Inamine), was going to speak (at the convention as) Hawai'i's (entrant). I (spent time) working with him. (Stevenson) Ching had to be (in Kansas City a few days earlier to attend) the meetings of the (NAFFA) executive committee.

Well anyway, to make a long story short, when I got back (the farm had been) mismanaged. It was a mess. So I figured, oh boy, if this is the kind of guy they're going to send me, he won't last more than a year or so and the farm will go kaput and everything would be jammed up, things that we'd been building for seven years. So when (the DPI agreed to) send me a man [Ikeda] to spend the whole year (I was happy. We alternated.) I did the outdoor work while he did the teaching in the classroom, (and vice versa. We also agreed that) he would take more (responsibility for) the horticulture and I would take more of (the responsibility for) the animal husbandry. That made it simpler, we were able to do a lot of things that one man couldn't do. So then I felt free to leave Kaua'i and take the job as a principal of Pā'auhau.

WN: Did you want to do that?

LC: No, I was happy. I wanted to buy the farm. I told the principal, "Sell me the farm and I'll

stay, and after school your kids can come here (to work) and I'll pay them." I didn't want to leave, because my wife was from Kaua'i and my two boys were born there. But my family was over here [Hawai'i] and my father had some property in Honomū, about thirty acres, which I was interested in buying and farming up there. I love the soil, I love plants and animals.

WN: It must have been difficult to leave that farm on Kaua'i?

LC: (Yes.)

WN: So what did the principal say when you offered to buy it?

LC: "Eh, no way." He knew (the farm) was making money. He had his school records to show it. So we came over on a boat, and when we got to Honolulu they made us unload all of our stuff. (At) four o'clock the army gave us clearance—or the armed forces (did)—to (sail to) Hawai'i. So we (paid to) load everything back (on the boat and paid for having this done).

You know, (in) those days, the guys—(the) longshoremen—didn't give a damn if they banged stuff around. We got to Hilo—I left my wife in Honolulu with the two boys with her calabash sister or relative—and came here to the Big Island. Of course, I had (also) shipped my car with me. Then all of our freight had to (be loaded) on a train, went all the way to Pa'auilo. (At Pa'auilo the freight was transferred to trucks—Nobriga's Transport Services. By the time they got down to Pā'auhau, they had (really) been banged around. When I opened the different crates, (I found) dishes (and other fragile items) were broken. What a mess.

Anyway, I tried to get everything set at Pā'auhau and get ready for the first day of school. (Being a teaching principal, I was in charge of) the seventh-grade class. There were (a total) seventeen kids (boys and girls). I had to do the payroll for the teachers, the cafeteria reports, bank the money, and all kinds of (other) "dogcatcher" jobs.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

LC: I (believe we added) the kindergarten that (first) year at the school. (In general) it was quite an interesting year. I learned (to) deal (with) more things (than previously). But having the (experience of) running the farm, keeping (records, handling finances were) a help.

WN: So Pā'auhau was K [i.e., kindergarten] to seventh [grade].

LC: Right, K to seventh. There were (several small community schools such as) Pā'auhau, Kukuihaele, (Waipi'o), and Kapehu (in Hāmākua).

WN: Kapehu?

LC: (Yes), Kapehu. In fact, all these three schools are closed now. (At that time) the three of us were brand-new principals. We got together and then tried to see how we could help each other. And then we asked for at least one or two days a week (of secretarial) help. (During) the second half of the year, we did get help. I think the girl spent two days at Kukuihaele and two days at (Pā'auhau), and the other day was (used by) Kapehu. I don't recall offhand. That

community was really interesting, because the kids there, the boys and the girls, were playing hopscotch.

(Laughter)

LC: I pushed those kids to the limit as far as their education (was concerned) and tried all kinds of novel ways to teach them. We'd use mental arithmetic, different types of art. For the first time the school had a May Day program, but a Hawaiian-type May Day program. (We) taught them (some) Hawaiiana. I got the boys to play touch football—of course, it wasn't always touch. (I also) taught them how to play basketball. They had a (plantation) gym there, (but) the kids never (could use) it. It was (kept) locked.

WN: The plantation gym?

LC: (Yes.) We went to Haina to play the kids down there, (and) we went to Pa'auilo to play the kids over there. (Pā'auhau had a swimming pool for fire protection. We taught the boys to play water polo. The girls sewed the caps for both teams, with goalkeepers having colored caps. The following year I was transferred) to Pa'auilo School for two years [1944–46] and then (was moved) to Ka'ū.

When I got to Ka'ū [formerly known as Pāhala School]. Well, when I got to Ka'ū we started baseball in Ka'ū. At that time they only had basketball. And here comes the Honoka'a (High School) team to play us. And eight of the nine boys were the kids that I had, including Gary Aganos, and (Henry) Meyer. These fellas who were top-notch athletes at Honoka'a High School, but (eight of the team) started down in Pā'auhau. (Honoka'a) whipped the Ka'ū team.

WN: So you started the sports programs at Pā'auhau?

LC: At Pā'auhau, (yes, along with) other programs, (such as the) May Day programs. We got the PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] actively involved in the school, we tried to upgrade the whole operation over there. (We even had night classes for adults.)

WN: How would you compare the Waimea community with the Pā'auhau community?

LC: Well, Pā'auhau was strictly sugar plantation and different type of management, too, on the plantation. This was that old Scotch-coast type of operation near the Hāmākua Coast, so it was a little bit different. But you had Honoka'a town. Of course, (because of the war) gasoline (was rationed), which made it very difficult to bank (school) money (daily). Banks did not come and pick up the money, which made it tough. We had a safe, so I got permission to just go to the bank twice during the week rather than every day. We only had seven on the staff, including the kindergarten teacher (and me).

WN: So what kind of philosophy did you come into Pa'auhau with as far as being a principal? Did you try to follow what the principals at Waimea were doing or . . .

LC: No, no.

WN: . . . did you try to change anything?

- LC: Oh (yes, yes,) sure. I had more time, because it was such a small school. Ernest DeSilva as the district superintendent—at that time there were three district superintendents [i.e., supervising principals]. From Ka'ū all the way to Kohala was—Cecil Dotts. You can check with him. And from Volcano all the way to Ha'aheo, Mrs. Giacometti was the district superintendent.
- WN: What was her name?
- LC: Giacometti. And then Ernest DeSilva had from. . . .
- WN: Hilo?
- LC: No, no. He started with Pāpa'ikou—which was Kalaniana'ole all the way out to Waipi'o Valley. (There was) a (one-room) school down there. Sam [Kaaekuahiwi], an old Hawaiian fellow, was down there [teaching]. He used to come up on a horse to the top of the hill, and then he would catch a ride with the principal of Kukuihaele [School] and come to our meetings. At that time there were, as I told you, about fifty-six schools on the island.
- WN: So Ernest DeSilva's area was Hilo, too? Hilo area?
- LC: No, no. Giacometti had from Volcano to Ha'aheo. Ha'aheo is part of Wainaku area. It's a beautiful school. Small school, but nice.
- WN: And what about this Miss Hundley?
- LC: Miss Hundley was on Kaua'i.
- WN: Oh, I'm sorry. Yeah, okay. Do you remember her first name, by the way?
- LC: Bernice.
- WN: Bernice, okay.
- LC: She had gone to finishing school and everything. She was really an interesting person.
- WN: Okay, so Ernest DeSilva was your district superintendent.
- LC: Right, (he visited schools as often as he could. We didn't have principals' meetings during school hours). (We) met on Saturdays, (or after school in the various areas of the district).
- WN: How did you—oh, by the way, how was your pay different from Waimea High to . . .
- LC: Oh, by that time I was making \$250 as an ag teacher, and my pay at Pā'auhau was \$240. (Laughs) Of course, the principals only worked nine months, (was still) less pay. But I didn't mind. It was tough because we didn't have gasoline, so I couldn't visit my folks at Hakalau very much. Of course the train was running, so we used to park our car down at the railroad

station and then catch the train to Hakalau or to go to Hilo. We'd go to Hilo and shop or go to the dentist or whatever we had to do and then come back on the train to Pa'ailo, then get in our car and go (back) to Pā'auhau. It was tough, but we didn't mind it. (It was kind of exciting.)

WN: So were you pretty much autonomous?

LC: (Yes.) The principal of Honoka'a High School was a fella named (Herman) Larsgaard. He was nice to us, because we were part of his little *kuleana* anyway. (Almost) all (of) our kids went (on) to Honoka'a. The kids from Pa'ailo, Pā'auhau, Kukuihaele, and Waipi'o all went to Honoka'a anyway. So that little nest area kind of stuck together. In fact, at that time, the Hāmākua Teachers' Association (was formed).

WN: What was the purpose of that organization?

LC: The first teachers' organization was (formed or) organized in Hilo way back when. My dad was one of the founders of that group. But he was from Hakalau. He'd go into Hilo to (meetings). They did demonstrations in teaching. The teachers and the principals would all see which was a successful way of handling a certain subject or certain problem (in a class). It was really an educational-type association. Later on, the HEA was formed in Honolulu, and then these units were affiliated with them. But that's (the way) it was.

WN: So it was more content. It had nothing to do with, say—it wasn't like a union, right?

LC: It wasn't, but it was called Hilo Teachers' Union later, that's when my dad and (others) started to get active. (Later) I came into the scene (as did) my brother and (others) and all the principals and teachers that felt they wanted to participate.

WN: When did you get active in it, about when?

LC: When I went to Kaua'i. The HEA started in 1920. That's when my dad and (others got it) organized. I went to teach (in) 1935. (The HEA was) already organized and operating. (Later) I (became) the president of the Kaua'i Education Association. I also was (one of the group who) first (started a teachers') credit union on Kaua'i, I was the treasurer. (Later) it got to be too much work, and I just had to forget about it, because I (lived) out in Waimea, twenty-eight miles away (from Lihue).

WN: Okay.

LC: So from Pā'auhau, they sent me to Pa'ailo [in 1944].

WN: How come so short at Pā'auhau? Only one year?

LC: (Yes.) Only one year. The principal at Pa'ailo was retiring or was moving to Honolulu. (I heard that) the community wanted to (make some changes at) the school. (Mr. Ernest DeSilva) asked me to go there. (I talked it over with my family and we decided to move. We took our) furniture and stuffed it in a (Pa'ailo) classroom (as the principal would not move till August 15.) My wife, two boys (and I went back) to Kaua'i. The (Second World) War

was (still) on. (That) summer, I worked for the Coca-Cola Company on Kaua'i to make enough money to cover (the) cost of the trip. (I also) worked at (the) USO [United Service Organizations] in the evenings making sandwiches and doing (odd jobs). I was doing two jobs and meeting with (old friends, then back to Hāmākua and) school.

WN: Now Pa'auilo was K to seven also?

LC: No, Pa'auilo was---they didn't have a kindergarten until I got there and then I got one going. When I left, they were K to nine, and I taught ninth grade.

WN: So in both cases---in Pā'auhau and Pa'auilo---you helped start---you started the kindergarten.

LC: (Yes.)

WN: Now, was that like an order from above or was that your own initiative?

LC: I was interested in early education, and so I figured that if you can get (them) that young and start them and work with them, that you can help (them) with their health habits and (the three R's). You can get (them) more adjusted, and at the same time, you were helping the parents so (that) they could be taking care of the younger (sibling). Those days, families (were large).

WN: So what was---the law then was you had to start school at grade one? Is that what it was?

LC: (Yes), one.

WN: Today it's K, right?

LC: But K was optional [then].

WN: I see.

LC: Kindergarten was optional. If you had ten or fifteen kids, then you could get (permission to add a kindergarten). In fact, I think the plantation manager's son and my son (attended) kindergarten (in Pa'auilo. The manager's wife helped get it) started. The plantation carpenters made all the furniture and (most of) the (items) that we need for (a) kindergarten. Really interesting. Of course, when I was at Pa'auilo, the school burned down on a Sunday.

WN: Oh, really.

LC: (Yes.)

WN: The whole school?

LC: The whole school went down, except for three classrooms. (The fire) started on a Sunday. I was having lunch with the auditors. I had gone to school with some of them, like Curtis Heen. I (asked) them come over and have lunch. (At that time) you could buy meat real cheap from the farmers or the ranchers around the plantation. We were sitting down eating lunch,

and I'll be darned, the school started to burn. I think it was faulty wiring. Within a week we had to (re-)start that school. I talked to (Henry) Gouveia, who was principal of Kalaniana'ole [School]. He sent out furniture and books and (supplies on the train). I guess he was happy to get rid of (some of his inventory).

WN: What part of the year was it? Was it when school was in session?

LC: (Yes), school was in session.

WN: So in the meantime what happened?

LC: A lot of records were destroyed, we could (not replace these). I was working on (materials for a) master's degree, and all my papers were burned, (as well as) my typewriter—which was a (very old portable model). And they had closed Waipi'o School the year before. I asked the plantation at Honoka'a if they would loan us a (mule) pack train. I took four of my (students) with me. We went (to the stables for the) pack train. We (then) went down (into) Waipi'o Valley to the school. We collected all the books in there, which were really all the latest type for, probably, kindergarten to about maybe sixth grade. (We filled large feed bags with the books and supplies). We (ate) lunch down there, and then we came back (up the side of the valley) with the mule train. (The youngsters who went on the trip had an experience they will long remember. A week later school reopened.)

We had four classes going in the plantation gymnasium. The Japanese[-language] school had a building, but they had new lumber all stacked in there because they were going to build a church. But, they moved that lumber out and they gave us the four classrooms to use. (The basement of the Buddhist church housed our) kindergarten. The Episcopalians loaned us their hall, which wasn't very big. The Filipino association loaned us their hall. So within one week we (did start) school. The cafeteria was (set up) in another building. It was actually the basement of a classroom. So we were able to prepare food. In the morning I would take the food to these different locations. We still had two rooms on the campus. (The old school burned down in forty-five minutes, but changed the educational process in the community.)

WN: How old was the building?

LC: Oh, the building had two parts to it. One part was new. That's where the homemaking and the cafeteria and seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-grade classes were housed. That (unit) was brand-new. And the other half (of the building) must have been about—I would just venture a guess, probably about seventy or eighty years old. That's the part where the fire started. They had old-fashioned wiring in there. To turn the lights on you put a key into a switch. And a lot of the wires---(going) up into the attic, because we had trouble with rats, and I went up there to put poison and (set traps). I noticed that there were rat nests and paper up there. I told the board of health, and so those (trappers) went up with me. Rats were living up in that area, and I think that they had chewed some of the wire bare. Probably that's where the fire started. That's my own (guess).

WN: Did you get any help from the district office or the territorial office?

LC: Not from the territorial office, but from the district office, (yes). Ernest DeSilva was a big

help. Principals (who) had extra books and (materials) helped us out. Then the county came out and put up some canec buildings in a hurry.

WN: Really? You didn't have to teach classes outside or anything like that?

LC: No, no, we didn't. But as I said, every morning I'd go to the gym, leave the food with a certain number of plates, then I'd go to the Columbus Hall—which was the Episcopalian hall—and drop off their food and plates. Then I'd go to the Japanese school and the Japanese temple and (on to the Filipino Hall to deliver their food and collect attendance sheets). We had all kinds of experiences. (On a rainy day) that Columbus Hall (would leak). So I took a (kerosene) stove down there, so the kids could dry themselves. Another time, the outhouse at the Filipino hall turned over or somebody turned it over. I don't know. These are (only some of the) kinds of things that we went through. If you (were) teaching four classes in an open gymnasium (with students sitting in the bleachers), you can imagine (what) they had to (do so as) to not disturb (the) other (teacher's presentation).

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 21-22-2-91

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Laurence J. Capellas (LC)

April 25, 1991

Honolulu, O'ahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Laurence Capellas on April 25, 1991, in Honolulu, O'ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Mr. Capellas, we finished the last interview talking about your experience at Pa'auilo School, and we finished talking about the fire, and we want to get into your 1946 experience at Pāhala School.

LC: Right.

WN: Prior to that, you told me that you had some more information about your parents, maybe we can talk about that.

LC: That's right. My sister, who was an elementary school teacher, Cecilia Capellas Muirhead, I was asking her about when my mother came over and how old my mother was. She said that my mother, who was born in 1879, came to Hawai'i on a sailing boat around the Cape when she was seven years old. They sailed from Madeira in 1886, and it took them three months to get here. (Do) you realize those boats were only a little bit bigger than the Hawaiian double canoes? My dad, who was born in 1880, came over when he was three years old. He came over in 1883, which was three years after my mother arrived here.

WN: Before your mother arrived.

LC: Before, (yes,) excuse me. And they were married in 1903, which means that my dad was about twenty-three. At that time he was the principal at Hakalau School.

WN: Do you have the birth dates of your parents there?

LC: No, I got it at home. But I'll get them to you. [Eliza Reis Capellas was born September 19, 1879; Eugene S. Capellas was born February 26, 1880.]

WN: And your father was from Madeira, also?

LC: No, no. My father came from the Azores. He was born in the district called Capellas.

WN: Yeah?

LC: Uh huh. Something like Kona or Puna, you know. And so his name was Santos, Santos de Capellas. And after a while, there (were) so many Santos, they just drop the Santos.

WN: Oh, the last name was—the surname was Santos de Capellas?

LC: (Yes, yes.) So he was Eugene S. Capellas, Eugene Santos Capellas.

WN: Oh. So his middle name was Santos?

LC: (Yes.)

WN: And your mother was Eliza . . .

LC: Reis.

WN: Reis.

LC: (Yes), Reis. Eliza Reis, right.

WN: Okay, okay, good. So now that we got that cleared up, in 1946, you moved from Pa'auilo School to Pāhala.

LC: That's right.

WN: So what were the circumstances around that move?

LC: Well, several of the younger principals were being promoted at that time. For example, Harry Chuck moved to Hilo High. And they wanted me to go to either Kona Waena or (to) Pāhala. But the manager at Pāhala at that time, Jack Ramsey, who was a good friend of my dad, insisted that the DOE send me there, which, in a way, was a good thing, because I worked well with the plantation people and we had good rapport. I enjoyed those years [1946–59] there.

While I was there, we changed the name from Pāhala High School to Ka'ū High. But the Pāhala people, being very proud, didn't want to give up the name Pāhala. So they insisted that the name be Ka'ū High and Pāhala Elementary, which was kind of funny, but the Board of Education bought that idea.

WN: So Pāhala was elementary?

LC: It was all the way from first grade through the twelfth, the youngsters came from Nā'ālehu and Pāhala (to the high school section). There's lot of rivalry between those two plantations. I guess (that was) the way they got more sugar per acre. The managers (got) after the employees and starting the real rivalry, which in a way made it more difficult to run the school when you had kids from two communities that were always competing. On the other hand, it also gave them a reason to try harder, to show that their community was tops. In a

way, it was kind of fun, too.

WN: So why did they want to rename it Ka'ū?

LC: I wanted to rename (the high school) Ka'ū, because it really was a Ka'ū district high school. And later on, what I wanted to do was move the youngsters, at least from the ninth grade, over to Pāhala.

I wanted to move the seventh, eighth, and ninth graders over, so that they could have a chance to take science, and math, and art, and music. And so we could start them in the seventh, because we weren't a very big school anyway.

I thought being a small school had its advantages, too, because of the fact that you got a fighting chance to be a senior-class president or valedictorian, as compared to being in a big school. And the classes are smaller, so you have more individual attention. And when you get to know the kids, I think you can help them more. In a big school, a lot of them are going to be kind of shy, and they just keep out of the limelight. Whereas in a small school, you can take the kids and make them move up to the max of their talent. Because that's the only way our kids are really going to move. If they're going to say, "Ah, let George do it," they're not going to grow.

WN: So the kids were going to what was called Pāhala Elementary and High School—that was the original name?

LC: (Yes.)

WN: And you wanted to rename the whole school Ka'ū?

LC: Ka'ū, (yes), Ka'ū High School. But I didn't know how to still keep the Pāhala name, and some of the vocal people in the community informed me that their kids were entitled to the name Pāhala. I think it's the only name like that in the state.

WN: So it's still named that today?

LC: It's still named Ka'ū High and Pāhala Elementary.

WN: But it's still—it's on the same grounds.

LC: Right, it's on the same grounds. But what happened when I got there is we moved the elementary school to where the high school was and moved the high school to where the elementary was, which, of course, involved a lot of changes. We had to lower the blackboards, for example. Things that you may think are not important. And then we had to set up a health room for the elementary kids in what was the high school. Well, there were a lot of things like that. We had to rearrange storerooms. The only trouble now was that the cafeteria, which was in the (original) elementary school, now was located in the high school. It made it very difficult on rainy days for those little tykes to come (to lunch).

So I started to set up a plan for the area and got a new cafeteria in between the two schools,

but closer to the elementary, which was used by the whole school, of course. But then the elementary could use that area. And I made sure we had a stage in there. And I even had bars on the windows, which were high anyway—you couldn't use (them) as a fire escape—and got the kids in there, painted (lines) on the floor, painted basketball and volleyball and other types of markings that (were) needed. So on rainy days at least the kids could have fun in the (cafetorium). And then we had roll-away tables. Plus, you don't have that much rain in Pāhala.

In fact, in Pāhala, when you had rain, we would run on a rainy-day schedule, because we had to send the buses home early, before floods would come down. There's a lot of flooding over there, because it's a very slopey area. And the water coming down from the mountains in those little streams would cause floods, and then the kids couldn't get back to their camps.

But the plantation (developed a) long-term plan—I sat down with them and talked to them—they had planned anyway to move all those camps down and sell the homes to the people. They wanted to get out of the housing business.

WN: So how many plantations actually?

LC: Two plantations.

WN: One was Hutchinson [Sugar Plantation Company]?

LC: One was Hutchinson, and the other one was Hawaiian Ag [i.e., Hawaiian Agricultural Company]. Hawaiian Ag was in Pāhala.

WN: So how many years were you at Pāhala before you . . .

LC: I was there for thirteen years.

WN: . . . before you decided to change the name?

LC: Oh. Well, when I first got there, I noticed that there seemed to be a lot of rivalry between the two groups of youngsters that were attending the high school. At the time, Bill Waters became principal of Nā'ālehu [School], and I talked the thing over with him. We talked to the parents and the parents agreed that they would move the ninth-grade group over. That's where I made a mistake. And Bill now says we should have moved seventh, eighth, and ninth over, so that (we would) have a big intermediate school there. And then, gradually, as the Nā'ālehu area and (that area) past Nā'ālehu, which is now Ocean View Estates, grew they would have space at Nā'ālehu to pick up these (new students) and would have time, then, to do construction work in anticipation of a larger (Nā'ālehu elementary) school.

At that time, of course, C. Brewer [Company, Ltd.] was talking about putting up three hotels in the area and going into the visitor business. They (were) still in the process of doing that, but they've sold out to some Japanese company. There are other groups trying to come in. Because (Ka'ū is) such a vast area, and it's (also) a beautiful place. (At present there) aren't (very many) jobs there outside of the plantation.

WN: So, how did the—you know, here you are, new principal just coming into the community and deciding to change the name.

LC: I didn't start right off with that. When I got there, I ran into (other problems). (The ILWU [International Longshoremen's & Warehousemen's Union] was) getting ready for a strike. You know, the 1946 strike. And so the unions were trying to stir up anti-plantation sentiment. The trouble there (was that) the manager was such a nice guy, they really didn't (want to) picket him.

WN: Who was he?

LC: Jack Ramsey.

WN: Oh.

LC: They got along fine. In fact, when they actually did have that strike, it was kind of a token strike. While they were on strike, I got (the union) to come up and help us at the school, the carpenters and so forth. And we fixed up (several items). There was (an unused) boxing ring. We cut up the boxing ring and we set up a (portable) stage, a platform running up to the main stage. All (of the elementary) playground equipment was up near the high school now, because we had (exchanged buildings). So we moved their equipment down, and then we got the plantation to loan us bulldozers, and over the weekends we fixed a brand-new playground for the elementary kids. The fellows who were plumbers and so forth came up and helped us install (the metal pipe) swings.

We changed the school (grounds) in a hurry. We actually recovered about eight acres of land, and we started planning for building a swimming pool there. We were also, at that time, trying to get a library for the community. Because we just had a small (community) library, which was run by volunteers. I (was) talking about (school/community) library. Since then, soon after I left, they did build a school/community library.

WN: So you got a lot of free labor then?

LC: Oh, (yes). Well, we gave (the workers free) lunches at the school, which (in the long run) was really (inexpensive). The playground (area) was sloping, and we came in and leveled it off and then built a fence so the youngsters wouldn't get out of our playground (and fall) over a little cliff, which was about twelve (to) thirteen feet high.

We built a Little League diamond for the kids, we got them going, (trying) to keep them busy. All they did was play basketball, so I tried to get the boys interested in (other sports). (We organized) baseball teams. Then we played bootleg baseball with the other high schools and gradually build up the BIIF. Now the BIIF—Big Island Interscholastic Federation—is a strong and ongoing operation (with several interscholastic sports for both boys and girls).

WN: Oh, at that time you called it bootleg baseball because . . .

LC: No, what I mean (is it was not an official league).

WN: . . . no governing . . .

LC: (Yes,) right. We just (tried) to arrange games. We (also) tried to revive the (interscholastic) track program. Then we tried to get sports for the girls—girls and boys. I think (inter-school activities) build the community (and school) spirit. (One big problem was that) our (commercial) buses cost so darned much money (to rent). We bought surplus buses and had them remodeled and repainted. (Our school shop) built garages (for the buses). (We then had buses to) take (our students) into Hilo, to Volcano area on excursions. The school department is doing (this) now. The (DOE) puts it in their budget. (At that time) we had to finance (many things) ourselves. We cut the cost of a trip to Hilo, so when we took our youngsters with our own (buses)—built our own (service program). We had our own gasoline pumps and (equipment).

WN: All those kinds of improvements, did you need DOE central approval?

LC: (Yes), but I laugh now because they're talking about the schools being more independent. I was a pretty independent guy. In fact, my district superintendent told me, he says, "You know, Larry, you keep bending that school code, (and) one of these days you're going to break it. I'm going to get you!" That was (said in a friendly manner, of course).

We ran summer school for the (elementary students). Those that needed extra help (had) tutoring programs. We got the youngsters down in the elementary that had a lot of reading problems and we got teachers to volunteer. At that time, we didn't have a teachers' union. So teachers (did not mind) helping with these youngsters (on their own time).

When I first went there [in 1946], we had, I think, twenty-one teachers. And about eighteen of my staff were Mainland people and people who had come in from O'ahu or someplace else. So we had to kind of build a camaraderie. We worked together that way because we were (isolated) way out there. It was difficult to get into (Hilo). The roads were bad. We didn't have that nice highway (now) going all the way to Ka'u. In fact, the road even from Hilo to the volcano was all cracked (concrete). That (concrete) road was built in 1927. I remember (the date) because I was a kid living up the volcano during the summers. We had a (summer) home up there. We still have it. It's 109 years old. Sometime when you're on the Big Island, I'll take you up there and show (it to) you. It's one of the oldest homes there.

WN: So did you need approval from the DOE to change the name?

LC: Well, that we had to go through the (channels). We got our PTA (to help). I believe in using PTAs, alumni and whatnot to support your school. We had carnivals. I was a carnival man. When I first got there, we didn't have a movie projector. One of these old-fashioned ones was all we had. We had to get money for that.

We wanted to start a band. There were a handful of old instruments there and just happened that one of those Mainland teachers and his wife both had interest in starting a band. The Buddhist minister's wife was interested in starting a band, so she got the little tykes, preschoolers and first (graders, started and parents interested).

Oh (yes), we added a kindergarten, which was another new thing. We (got Kapāpala School)

closed and used (their) buildings. We moved the cottage down and (used their classroom building to) build a new (primary building to house) two kindergarten classes and two first-grade classes. We redesigned the building so that it had its own toilets in the building. We got the teachers and the plantation head carpenter to help us draw the plans for a different type of classroom. It is still standing, it's still being used.

What (also) made me laugh, too, (was that) those (county) carpenters (were) all doing everything by hand, handsaws and everything. So I told them, "Hey, put in your budget that you want power saws, (planes) and all (the) stuff which you need for the next job that you have." (They did and got some necessary power tools for the first time.)

We had men that used to come even from Kona to repair our schools and do work there, rather than from Hilo. It was closer to Kona. Plus, Hilo carpenters were so busy, it was difficult (to get them to drive out to Pāhala).

WN: Now, Pāhala school district was West Hawai'i?

LC: (Yes), it was West Hawai'i. But at that time, they had already begun to consolidate the whole district. So West Hawai'i and East Hawai'i were set up as one (big) district. Previous to that, they had three district superintendents, one for Hilo and the immediate area, and one for the Hāmākua coast, and then the other one for Ka'ū and Kona. So now this [island] was all under one person. Ernest DeSilva was the (only) district superintendent.

WN: How did that work out?

LC: Fine. I think much better that way. Because we would have meetings—principals' meetings and so forth—and we'd have them on Saturdays. We would, then, all come into Hilo. And those of us from West Hawai'i started grumbling. Finally, we got them to agree that at least the high school principals' meetings would be held (in rotation). They'd come to Ka'ū, for example, and I'd show them what we were doing. (All high schools except Hilo High had) K to twelve. We'd show them what we were doing down in the elementary, what we were doing in the high school. We'd exchange ideas, and then have a school luncheon, spend (the rest of the day in a prearranged training and information session).

We ran our own workshops, too. We brought in people to help us, so that our teachers could be right on the cutting edge of what was going on in education in the various areas (of the curriculum).

WN: So when you moved onto Pāhala, you were—that was just a changeover. So prior to that, when you were at Pā'auhau and Pa'aulo, it was the East Hawai'i district? Hāmākua?

LC: (Yes), well it was Hāmākua area. Because East Hawai'i was made up of Hilo, all the way to the volcano and out to Ha'aheo. From Ha'aheo School, all the way up to the volcano belonged to the Hilo area. Then Hāmākua started with Pāpa'ikou and ran from Pāpa'ikou all the way out to Waipi'o.

When I first came to the island, we had fifty-six schools. Right now, I think they have thirty-one or thirty-three, something like that. And that includes a big increase in population. Right

now, I think the Big Island gets about 600 or 700 new kids every year. In fact, they (get) enough for a (new) school each year. The good part about it, it's spread around the island.

WN: What about Ka'ū? Did it grow in the thirteen years you were there?

LC: No, it grew very slowly, because it still remained a plantation town. But even then, small as we were—(we) only had ninety boys in the high school—we had a football team, we had a basketball team, we had a track team, and we had a baseball team. We got tennis going. The girls liked that, of course. (Then) we had track for the girls. And we entered into various educational activities. About that time we set up a secondary education conference, for (the students of the various) high schools, so they could get together. And eventually, they (began going to) Honolulu to state conferences.

As small as the (Ka'ū) community was, we tried to get the kids there to have pride in themselves. I told them the stories about how King Kamehameha had been trained over there, in the court of Kalani'ōpu'u. Kalani'ōpu'u was the (high) chief (of Ka'ū). Keoua [Kuahuula], of the flaming cloak, was his top young warrior [and son]. And Kamehameha and he were constantly testing each other's strength. But Kamehameha never did beat him. And actually, when they were adults and Kamehameha was taking over the island, they did fight two or three times. (These were) inconclusive battles because of the fact that Keoua, of the flaming cloak, couldn't leave his people alone because Kamehameha's people would come from Kona and attack them.

But the old Hawaiians (in Wai'ōhinu) there told me—I wish I had taped them—the old stories about the chiefs and how the people there (existed). The first (Polynesian) people came to Hawai'i (and landed at) South Point.

(Ka'ū students do well.) From those classes that (graduated from Ka'ū High School,) we have doctors, engineers, and schoolteachers. I went to a reunion of one of the classes last year, and there was one fellow (there) who was (a space) engineer. (It was) fascinating. Some of those kids [who] went off to Honolulu to school, like MPI [Mid-Pacific Institute] and Kamehameha, (have) showed up well.

WN: So prior to Ka'ū High School coming up, where did these kids go to high school?

LC: Well, way back, like when I first started teaching Kaua'i, that's when the [territory] had moved to add the tenth grade, eleventh grade, and twelfth grade to several of the high schools. Because transportation was now better, and the communities wanted their own high schools. The population was increasing. Like Kaua'i High School was the only high school. But when I went to Kaua'i, I went to Waimea. That's the year they added the tenth grade. The next year, the eleventh grade. The next year, the twelfth grade. And they were doing the same thing at Kapa'a. Well, that was going on on this island, too. So originally the kids from Ka'ū either went to Hilo, to Hilo High School, or they went to Honolulu and went to, maybe, a private school. Or if they could stay with their friends or relatives, they attended McKinley or Farrington, or any school down there. (The same was happening on the Big Island.)

WN: I see. How would you compare Pā'auhau, Pa'auilo, and Pāhala? I mean . . .

LC: Well, Pā'auhau was a small plantation school, went up to the (seventh) grade. I tried to prepare those youngsters and get them to realize that they belonged to the Hāmākua community, and they should be proud of the fact that they came from Pā'auhau and (should) try to excel, but remember that their [high] school was going to be Honoka'a, so be thinking about what they (would) do there.

I don't know if I told you this story, but when I was in Pā'auhau—by the way, Pā'auhau School is completely wiped out, and it's all sugarcane now—I got these kids to start up a Little League team, boys' baseball team. Because when I got there, (the boys) were playing hopscotch with the girls and cutting up (water) hoses!

(Laughter)

LC: Later on when I got to Ka'ū and we started this informal baseball, Honoka'a came over to play us. And out of the nine kids on the team, eight of them were kids that I had (had) at Pā'auhau. Because when we were in Pā'auhau, we played Hā'ena, we played Pa'auilo, and we played the Honoka'a kids in the town. Just to get them to get to know those kids. They had to go to school with them anyway, so might as well get acquainted. (Yes,) they beat us. So I had a laugh with those kids.

WN: How about in terms of support from the plantation and the community?

LC: Excellent, excellent.

WN: Did it change at all?

LC: You know, that strike really didn't affect us at all. I mean, as I told you, it was kind of a token strike. (Yes,) Jack Ramsey was very supportive. He helped us in many, many ways. When we set up the carnivals to raise funds, he got his men to come up and give us a hand. Nā'ālehu did their share (also).

We had fun nights. The PTA ran the fun night. Then they used the money to buy us band instruments. We got a band going there. Then we worked on our science department and renovated it, so that it was okay and we could—kids really (had) something that they could use to (study and) learn. Instead of just having the teacher giving the demonstration, the kids themselves could (then) actually get a hands-on type project.

We fixed up our shop. The kids themselves worked on the shop, remodeled the whole shop inside, set up (a) drafting area and the regular wood shop. Then we (built) a welding area. And the kids got in and actually did the planning, did the construction. (It) was an old building, which was a disgrace. It's been since knocked down and a new one put up. But little by little, we got the place all fixed up so that we (were able) [to have] (a better program in industrial arts).

We tried a lot of innovative things. I believe in—if somebody gets an idea, don't discourage him. A science teacher comes to me with some idea or English teacher comes to me with some idea, go ahead! And we'd help. As I say, we used our PTA. We worked as a kind of a community team. They're trying to do something like that now. They call it the school-base

program, . . .

WN: Right, school/community-based program.

LC: . . . school/community, (yes). We were doing that. We couldn't have run the school if we didn't do it. It's nothing new. It just goes around, comes back again. Takes about fifty years, but it comes back.

WN: (Laughs) So somewhere between the time you were there, as principal, and the time they're trying to do it now, like right now, something happened, right?

LC: (Yes.) Well anyway, while I was there, I was offered Kailua High School. I was offered Kaua'i High School. I was offered Roosevelt. Towards the end, Farrington, Kahuku. In fact, I (even) went down and took a look at Kahuku. I liked the place, but the traffic (was) what discouraged me. Driving over, hitting the traffic. Coming back, hitting the traffic. I said, "Hey, this is not for me."

And Lahaina Luna twice asked me to go. (Having been) an ag teacher, I really liked the idea of Lahaina Luna. In fact, when I was at Ka'u, we would bring kids out from the probation department. I'd get the kid out there, put him in a home, and give him a part-time job, and let it kind of turn the kid around. We had fourteen kids we brought out altogether in the thirteen years I was there. We only lost one.

WN: These are problem children?

LC: (Yes.)

WN: Problem students?

LC: (Yes), but with some brains and some athletic ability. Because I believe that if a boy is an athlete, you can really get him to be recognized by the other kids in the school. And he won't be the nucleus for trouble. Instead he would be somebody who turns around, and the kids really begin to like him. He feels better, and he starts to be a (good) example (and a role model for some).

WN: Regarding your relations with the plantation manager, was there any times when the manager told you what he wanted, you know, for the school, or what vision he had for the school, what he wanted the kids to be learning, or anything like that?

LC: No, no. He didn't interfere at all. All he was there for was simply to help (the youth to advance in learning experiences), and his door was always open to me. He and my dad were old friends. He was manager of Honomū (Sugar Company) when I lived in Hakalau, which is only two-and-a-half miles away. The manager at Nā'ālehu, (James Beatty, was helpful, too).

We got a Lions Club going, which was (helpful). What we would do between the schools was take the band and (have) them play a concert for the kids in (that) school. We played touch football with them, we played basketball. This is now up to the ninth grade, until we moved the ninth grade over (to Pāhala). We tried not only athletics, but we tried to have some

educational activities between the two schools. When we'd have workshops, we'd plan with Nā'ālehu. We'd have workshops in certain areas, maybe on reading, or a workshop on science, or whatever the topic was. And then we could get to the (resource) people that we needed.

WN: Was there any concern that the kids were getting too educated?

LC: No, no. No, I didn't have that problem. I've heard stories about how the plantation, like out in Hāmākua way, didn't want the kids to go past high school, if possible. But we never had that problem. I know (that) when we had the 150th class last year, that this was brought out by some of the old-timers.

I believe in giving the local kids a chance to move. They've got the brain power. I believe that you can do anything that you want to. You got to realize that, for example, if you're digging a tunnel, you're going to hit a big rock, okay. That's going to be one of the things that you're going to have to conquer. You're going to take that rock out, or you're going to quit digging the tunnel. Because you're going to hit some more rocks and some more rocks, but at the end you'll get through, and you'll see the light at the end of the tunnel. But (that) doesn't come easy. You got to learn to live (and work) with all kinds of people. You can work with a boss. As a little kid, twelve years old, I was working on the plantation, and the *luna* had a big stick. He kept us moving, and never mind the nonsense. Weeding cane or cutting seed. As I grew older, I (began to) think anybody can be anything he wants to (be). But my grandfather used to say that what a man can think of, he can do.

WN: Harold Loper was superintendent at that time. Did you ever talk with him?

LC: (Yes.) I liked him. He was principal of Kaua'i High School when my wife was going to Kaua'i High School. So (yes), he came over to visit us, took him up to (our) cottage. He was a good piano player. So after school, we went up there and sat down. He played the piano. We got some of the teachers (to come) in.

It was so difficult to get into Hilo at that time because the roads were bad. But we formed our own little social community in Nā'ālehu and Pāhala. The teachers got together from both schools, and they set up a kind of a choir. They learned Hawaiian songs, and then they learned dances. They would have parties together. And, as I told you, they had workshops together.

But we got a lot of support from the district office from Ernest DeSilva and his people—Mrs. Lorna Desha, and Mrs. [Alice] Lujan, lot of the old-timers. Mrs. [Edna] Kirk came out and helped us. And we put them up in our cottage, the people that ran the workshop, including the people that came from O'ahu. We set up a teachers' resource center where we had a lot of material (for teachers to borrow).

WN: Now, you were there for thirteen years, from '46 to '59. That's a long time.

LC: (Yes), but as I told you, in the meantime, I got attached to the community, and I felt a warm feeling for the people there. Because (from the time that I was) a kid, I always was for the underdog.

WN: So by the time you started looking at being—getting offers from Roosevelt and Kahuku . . .

LC: (Yes.)

WN: . . . and so forth, is that—you were looking around?

LC: No, no. The school department was looking around, I think.

WN: Was there like a shortage of principals then?

LC: (I don't know.) I'd like to think it was a little bit of both. Because we were doing a lot of novel things in Ka'ū with our staff and the community that, I think, it made them take note. When they'd come to visit our school, we'd show them all kinds of new things that we were trying, and (these) things that were successful.

I was offered Hilo High School, after Ernest DeSilva, the [district] superintendent, died of a heart attack. Ralph Kiyosaki was then appointed as district superintendent. He took Harry Chuck as his assistant. They offered me the high school.

I told Kiyosaki, "You know, I'm happy over here [Ka'ū]. I have no great ambitions. I mean, I like to work with people like this, who are kind of like a family, and try to get the kids to achieve. If a kid can run fifty miles an hour, I don't want him to run twenty miles an hour. If he can study and become an engineer or go to work in some field or be a good businessman or a doctor or something, I want him to feel that just because he came from a small place like Ka'ū, that he shouldn't feel that, oh, he won't have a chance against some people that come from a more affluent area. Because these kids had to work, too, work at home." That's why I stayed there.

But, then he told me, "(Mr.) Gordon (has asked me to talk to you)."

WN: Walton Gordon.

LC: Walton Gordon. He says, "Walton Gordon said for me to appoint you. He wants you at Hilo High School."

WN: Walton Gordon was [school] superintendent at that time.

LC: I told him, "Hey, I don't care what Walton Gordon wants. If you want me to go, I'll go. But if I'm not selected, it doesn't bother me. I'm happy right here. I'll tell you what, let's wait a couple of weeks. If you still want me to go, I'll go."

And so two or three days later, he calls up, he says, "Hey, we can't be fooling around. I want you to come." That's it, so. . . .

I was glad I went, because he was really a big help. (Ralph) is a brilliant man.

WN: Kiyosaki. Ralph Kiyosaki.

LC: (Yes), Ralph Kiyosaki, he's a brilliant man. He has (many, many) good ideas. He's the kind of guy that will challenge your thinking.

WN: So, this is in '59 that you moved to Hilo. Well, how did you feel? How did you say goodbye to the Ka'ū community?

LC: Well, this was the last minute, it was during the summer. So I had to leave my wife there because we had no place to stay. I stayed at my dad's place for a year. And then we got my wife moved in, and she taught at Kaūmana [School]. She (retired in 1970 after teaching) for thirty-five years. She still has a lot of friends (at Kaūmana).

When we got to Hilo High School, that was really something. Because after fighting Hilo High School and trying to see how we could outmaneuver them (chuckles) . . .

WN: Now you're at the top.

LC: Now at the top. And now the maneuvers I used to use as a small high school principal had to be changed.

WN: Let me turn the tape over.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay, so we're at Hilo High School.

LC: (Yes.) So it was during the summer that I moved over. I had to first go get acquainted with the whole school. And the best thing to do is first get to know your secretary and get to know your vice principals and your custodians. They're key people there—and your cafeteria manager—get acquainted. And that was a rough year, because (in) 1960 (had the tsunami). We had the lava down Kapoho [in 1960], which wiped out Kapoho School. And Pāhoa was having a hard time. I had a student strike. (Hilo High still allowed) hazing. (The juniors) came to me with a list of what they were going to do. And I looked it all over. I talked to my counselors, they looked it over and said, (yes, they thought it would) be all right.

But the kids didn't follow through with what they promised (that) they were going to do. A girl came in my office, somebody had taken an egg and smashed it on her permanent, which was a big cost. I went outside and saw (what was going on). They had a girl kneeling down and trying to get her to—these were the upperclassmen—trying to get this sophomore girl to push a peanut with her nose. The bell rang, and the kids didn't go back to their classes. They still wanted to (continue) the hazing. I went into my office, got on the PA system, and told the kids that they had not followed the agreement, the rules that we had set, and so they were all to go back to their classrooms, that the hazing was over. That was it. The initiation was over.

Well, the kids that started the strike were the ones—they had already called the newspaper. They got the newspaper people up there. These were kids that were kicked out of Kam School, kicked out of Punahou, kicked out of I don't know what other school around there. And they were a nucleus of kids who had just moved into the Hilo area. I guess the Honolulu schools were clamping down on them.

So I called (Mr.) Kiyosaki and told him what had happened and why I had sent the kids back (to their rooms). So he said he would be coming up. I called Dr. Goo, who was a member of the school board. They (both) came up, and we talked it over.

Then over the PA system, I told the kids I wanted each class to send their representatives to (the) conference room. (When) they got there, I talked to them. (Mr.) Kiyosaki talked to them. (Dr.) Goo talked to them. We agreed that we weren't going to have that kind of nonsense. That hazing, after all, was only done in sororities (and fraternities) in colleges. And that was it. I told them that (if) any of them had any ideas, send somebody up to my office (to) talk to me.

I said, "Get a permit from your teacher, or I'll give you one, and you can come in and sit down." I said, "You want to come in as a group, fine." I said, "But we're not going to operate a (high) school like this."

WN: Was the strike pretty much wide-scale? I mean, were most of the students on strike?

LC: No, no, not too many. (A small group) set the whole thing up. We had just received some bad publicity from something that happened during the summer, before I got there. Apparently some gang of boys had raped a girl, and so the *Honolulu Advertiser* had "Hilo High School Has Sex Orgy." That newspaper (will) do anything to sell papers. (The incident) had happened during the summer. I didn't know anything about it when I got (to Hilo High in the middle of August).

So I guessed it was a time to make some changes in the school. And we did. We reorganized our faculty and set up a curriculum committee. I got one of my vice principals (to head) that curriculum committee. One of the things they did was to set up a plan for purchasing books. In other words, some teachers, some department heads, who were more or less leaders in the school, (were) getting new books all the time, and the other poor ones would be quiet. (The curriculum committee) would (now) make the decision as to whether they needed new science books, new English books, and so forth. And then we talked—they talked—I went in there when I could—and we talked about some of the courses that we had that we should change, drop, some new (course) that we could bring in. So (as a result), while I was there (at Hilo) we dropped about thirty of the courses that we had and instituted courses (that were more adaptable to the changing times).

For example, (take) a kid who's in all kinds of mischief and whatnot and (is) not interested in school, a potential dropout. He doesn't want to read *Silas Marner* and all the rest of that that they try to (force him to study). And so we reorganized, little by little, you know, just reorganized the whole school.

What we did was—that first year, for example, they had no library. The library was one of

these old canec-fabricated buildings that the army built during the war. I went in there—I was a guy that didn't sit in my office very often. Every recess I was down around the boys' lavatory and so forth, checking so there won't be any smoking or gambling or stuff. I didn't stand for that, smoking especially, because Pa'auilo School burnt down when I was there. And I'll be darned if I was going to have a second school burn down. And Hilo High was a (fire)trap, the way it was set up.

So we took a look at all the books that we had there. I called the department heads down that had a lot of books, like Dr. [Elaine] Kono—she's passed away. But we went to the English section. I said, "You know, Elaine, most of the books here are from the English department." I said, "Grab one off the shelf, any one you want to, and let me take a look at it."

So she took a book off. And I opened the book up, and I said, "Look, this book has not been used for ten years." I said, "Ten years, Elaine. What are we using the space for? We have no room for all of these books in our school."

So she and I finally agreed that we would keep no more than three copies, simply as reference. And after we went through the whole thing, all set up, I told Ralph what we were going to do. We got the county to bring up the trucks, and we dumped the books. I told the kids, "You can have them. Take them home if you want to. If not, then we're going to throw them away."

WN: These are like multiple copies of the same book.

LC: Oh (yes). They had new books in the classrooms and they (only) needed (a few "oldies") for reference. So we cleaned, rearranged the library. In the meantime, meeting with alumni and the PTA—by the way, the PTA was a very weak (one).

WN: Weaker than at, say, Ka'ū?

LC: Oh, (yes). And I believed in a strong PTA, (and a) strong alumni. So we reorganized. We got 900 (parents to join the) Hilo High School (for) the first time. We got the parents to come in on a certain night, they went to visit the classrooms of their students. Sat and talked to the teachers and so forth. We tried a lot of things like that to get them to become closer (to) the school.

I talked to the PTA, to the alumni. I told them, "Look, we (need) some new buildings over here. I got a reputation as a jockstrap. When I was at Ka'ū I sat in on all the sports." I said, "But I (need) a library that's (even) bigger than our gymnasium. We need it. We need it badly. (We can use a part of it as a) multi-purpose room, where we can (have) a lot of audio-visual aids. In that section we can maybe have classes donate (trophy) cases and put up all the trophies." Hilo High has a lot of trophies from all kinds of things, from forensics and other things, as well as sports.

And so I told (Mr.) Kiyosaki that we wanted to go down to the legislature—the president of the PTA, the president of the alumni and I—and we wanted to go down and get our legislators to give us money for a new library and for a new band room. The band room they had was a mess. It was an old shack and nobody could study when the band was playing in there. Plus,

we had break-ins all the time, because (the instruments were stored) underneath the gym.

We went to the legislature, and we did get the money to construct a brand-new library and a brand-new cafeteria, (a new band room), and a new ag (and art) building, because those were the worst (buildings) on the campus.

WN: Who were some of the legislators that helped you?

LC: Oh, Hara, Senator Hara.

WN: Stanley Hara.

LC: Stanley Hara. And Abe and . . .

WN: Kazuhisa Abe?

LC: Kazuhisa Abe. We went to see [William] "Doc" Hill. We got over a million bucks. At that time, that was big money.

WN: Had you lobbied before at Ka'ū and your other schools?

LC: (Yes), I was president of the Kaua'i Education Association. Then I came to the Big Island. I became president of the Hilo Teachers Union. And then later on, I became HEA president.

WN: What about on behalf of your schools?

LC: (Yes), sure. I always fought for my school to get things and tried to improve (on) what we had. One thing we did, too, (was get) money to remodel the chemistry lab, the biology lab, and the math section of the school. That building was put up in 1922! In the chemistry lab, the sinks were leaking. In the biology section, the tables were all old junk, and then the storage was (not safe). So we just remodeled that lower side. That's the first building that we tackled to remodel. The teachers (now) had a place where they could have all the chemicals, (supplies), and their equipment in safe areas. And the kids would (be) working in a safe place. So we fixed that all up. That's the *makai* building.

(Yes.) Oh, I believe that if you can explain to your legislators what's what, and you take the PTA president, like from Hilo High School, and the Hilo High School alumni president down and you talk to them. The PTA gave us some money. So we took (the legislators) to dinner, we lay the cards on the table, and got funding for the school. But Ralph knew that, and he supported us.

WN: How differently did you have to do things at Hilo compared to Ka'ū to get things done?

LC: In Ka'ū, you could always depend on the plantation in case the county would not bother too much with you. But in Hilo, you didn't have a plantation, you had many plantations.

One thing I had done just before I left Ka'ū is to get funds raised, in these carnivals (and other sources), to build a swimming pool at the school. Because, while I was there for

thirteen years, thirteen people had died, including some of my students, from not being able to swim. When I got to Hilo High School, I figured, boy, if we can get a swimming pool, I'm gonna make it a rule that nobody graduates from Hilo High School until they learn how to swim.

WN: Could you do that on your own or you needed approval?

LC: Well, we worked with the—my friend, Kiyosaki, "You're going to bend the stick until you break it, bend the school code." (Chuckles) No, I worked (within the rules).

So the first year I was there [1959], I tried to get a carnival going to start a swimming pool fund. I figured, Hilo, you surely ought to be able to—with that many people—get a swimming pool. And then we can use it during the summer for recreation for the community. We had a carnival. We raised \$9000. The teachers and the staff signed a petition—I think eighty-some-odd signatures—telling me, no more carnivals, please!

(Laughter)

LC: I laughed to myself. I said, "That's okay."

Well, in the meantime, Mrs. [Edith] Carlsmith heard that we had tried to raise money for the swimming pool. And I explained to her why we needed it, you know, and that they were into scholastic competition. And I said, "We don't have a lot of big kids, but maybe our kids can learn how to swim, and the better swimmers, maybe they can get scholarships, swimming." I started wrestling so that the smaller (boys) could still have a chance to get a scholarship.

(Mrs. Carlsmith) came to see me one day. And she told me, "You know, Mr. Capellas, my two sons have had band instruments, a saxophone and a trombone." She said, "I'm going to give them to the school, and I wonder if you would write me a letter to give the IRS, showing that we donated and what the value of these instruments are."

I said, "(Yes,) we need instruments at Hilo High School." In fact, my band teacher was repairing instruments, too, you know.

After we finished that part of the conversation, she said, "By the way, I understand you had a carnival to raise money for a swimming pool."

I said, "Yes, I really am sorry that it didn't go as well as we had hoped, but someday I'd like to see a swimming pool at Hilo High School. In fact, I'd like to see one at every high school. Because it's a good sport. It's the best sport of any for you to develop your body and have your body in good shape." I said, "Next to that is walking (briskly)." I was a PE major at the university, too, besides having an ag major.

And so she said, "I tell you what, when can you go with me to see John Dykes?" John Dykes was head of a trust in Hilo, First Hawaiian Trust.

And I said, "Why?"

She says, "Well, as soon as you let me know, then I'll tell you why."

So I said, "I'll go right now."

And so I called my secretary, I said, "I'm going to go down to First Hawaiian Trust with Mrs. Carlsmith to talk to John Dykes."

She said, "Okay."

And so I said, "If you need me, just call there." I wasn't just taking off and leaving the school by itself.

I got down there, and then she told John Dykes, "You know Mr. Capellas?"

"(Yes), I had known him from before."

And she said, "I came to see him about what I talked to you about."

(I thought,) "What the heck are these people talking about?"

He said, "Oh, okay."

Then in his Scotch brogue, he says, "Well, laddie," he says, "Mrs. [John M.] Ross has some stock in Honolulu Oil. Her husband bought it for five dollars a (share), and now it's worth about seventy to seventy-five dollars a stock."

(I thought,) what is this guy talking about?

He says, "We understand that you need money for a swimming pool."

I said, "(Yes), we really do."

So he says, "Well, how much do you need?"

I told him, "Oh, I don't know. I guess---the Ka'ū High School swimming pool cost about \$60,000. Maybe if we can get about, oh, \$90,000 then we can build a little bigger one in Hilo."

He says, "Well, I tell you what this is. I'll talk to the members of the trust who are handling her money, and I'll let you know." He says, "Come back on Thursday. We're meeting on Wednesday."

So Thursday I was right there. He told me, "Well, we agreed that we can give you the money." He says, "Can you get the plans drawn and everything?"

So I went down to the county building department, public works. And I knew a fellow there who used to do some drawings for us. I can't remember his name offhand—Shimizu. I told him what we wanted. So Shimizu came up and (asked to) look at the area. I (showed him the

place where the) old library (had been). I said, "We want to rip all this stuff out, because we (have) got to clean it up (anyway)." I (had in storage) steel I-beams and some three- or four-inch pipe. I said, "(We were) going to build bleachers with that (material) for our running track." Because we (were planning) to put in lights, and we wanted to have a place in Hilo (for) night track meets. "(However,)" I said, "you can put these in your plan and try (for covered bleachers around the swimming pool)." I (also) said, "I think we're going to get some money (to construct this swimming pool)."

He [is] a Hilo High School graduate. He says, "Yeah?"

I said, "(Yes), it's very possible, but keep it quiet, you know."

So he drew up the plans, and he said, "You know, we gotta get the county to give you permission to build a pool over here because this is a road right-of-way."

I said, "Why, right on the edge is a cliff."

He says, "Yeah, but that's a right-of-way, going all the way up to Pi'ihonua."

I said, "But there are buildings all over."

He says, "I know, but we still have to go through that."

So I went back. I said, "Draw the plans. I'll go talk to Mr. Kiyosaki, and we'll talk to the man in charge of the school buildings, Mr. Harry Katsura."

So we set the thing up. And, to make a long story short, I had to go back to (Mr. Dykes) for some more money for locker rooms and the rooms where we kept all the equipment for running the pool. But we did get the pool done. And we didn't have enough money. We got some money from another plantation manager's wife. They didn't want the thing publicized, but at the end it kind of leaked out. I didn't tell anybody, but I guess the ladies, probably in the community, the *Haole* ladies (did).

That pool—right now, I was there at an assembly (for) Hilo High School (who) won the (state basketball) championship this year—that pool can hold 2500 students (on) the bleachers. It's all concrete. And it's got steel beams and thick pipe. I don't know how many hundreds (or) thousands of kids have learned how to swim there, including community kids. They have summer programs, so it's really been a (godsend). I don't think (it could be duplicated) for less than, maybe, \$1.5 million.

But it's a place where they have their assemblies. Hilo rains (a lot). And the kids can get there. It's a place where they can study. And it's a good recreation place, really a beautiful thing (to behold).

WN: So it was all done by private money then.

LC: That was all private money.

WN: No state funding at all.

LC: Private money, with the assistance of the county loaning us the supervisor and the inspector and so forth. But then, the money we got from the legislature, we did put up that new gym and the new library. And after I left Hilo—I was there seven years [1959–66]. After I left there, then the cafeteria went up and some of the other buildings that we had planned for. But the reason I left the school was that I was the only secondary person who was interested in getting federal money and running federal programs, like vo-tech programs and programs that help kids that had reading problems and so forth. So seven years later, I went to the [Hawai'i] district office.

But in the meantime, we did make (many) changes. During that first year, all these things were already starting to take shape. I tried to talk to the teachers about changing the schedule of (giving) homework. Parents would tell me, "Hey, you know, my kids (are) studying until two o'clock in the morning. What's going on?"

I told them, "Wait a minute. This doesn't make any sense."

I would talk first to this curriculum committee, and then let them meet with their staff and so forth, and then bounce back ideas. We didn't have principals' meeting every Wednesday. That's a lot of nonsense. (So a schedule was arranged with homework being given for different subjects on different days.)

We reorganized the teachers' schedules, so that curriculum committee was free at a certain period so they could get together instead of trying to meet after school or during lunch, which is another thing that doesn't make sense.

(At a social studies teachers' meeting,) I said, "I'd like to suggest to you folks that we (set up a track III operation). You teachers all now have thirty-two kids (per class). What if we give you thirty-three (or thirty-four) kids, but we take these (track III) youngsters that are the troublemakers and the ones that are having problems with reading (skills and put them in classes of fifteen. We can ask some of you to) volunteer to take over these classes (with the risk of getting) burned out. If you take them at least for two years—in other words, if you take them only one year and say, 'I quit,' it won't make any sense. But if you'll at least promise you'll take them for two years, we'll give you an extra period (for conferences and) so that you can prepare your work. You can go talk to all the teachers who are having similar problems with kids and how they're handling them. Or you can go down to the district office and meet with the resource teachers there, to get ideas for your class. Or if you want to we can give you a day off. Sometime when it's convenient for you, if you want to go visit another school and see what they're doing (to help track III type) youngsters."

(Besides this,) we ran what we called "early bird" classes. We would have a teacher come in before school, one period before school, to help kids with (reading problems, or since) we didn't have enough room in our shops, (a teacher) could run an early shop class (or) run an after-school class. The after-school class, they were called the "eager beavers," because [it was] (for students) who wanted to stay after school just because (they wanted) to take auto shop and (couldn't get in). By the way, auto shop was one of the new classes (that) we started.

We (also) started the electronics classes. We started (several) new classes and (dropped courses that were not relevant). In the seven years we were there, we increased the number of kids that were going to higher education from about 40 percent to about 60 percent. (Actually) over 60 percent (were now) going to community college or to colleges or universities. (We also cut the problems in classrooms and) that had its benefits.

WN: Did you have more discipline problems at Hilo?

LC: No, because I ran a tight ship. (On the) first day of school, at (an) assembly, I told the youngsters, "There are three things in this school that I want to tell you that we need to have your cooperation (on). One is, we don't want any smoking in the school. Number one, it's against the law. Number two, this school is a very dangerous school for fires." I said, "I came from Pa'auilo School, where the school burned down. (It was a windy day) and (the) school burned down in forty-five minutes. We (will) have no smoking on the campus, that's for sure. That's number one. If you're caught smoking, you're going to come into my office. I have a paddle over there. Boy or girl," I said, "I'm going to paddle you three times as hard as I can." I said, "I'm not fooling. And I'll have a witness there, maybe two witnesses, if it's a girl." But I said, "You're going to get paddled." I said, "The second time you're caught smoking, we're going to turn you over the police because this is against the law. It's against a school law." I said, "The second thing I'm not going to stand for, and neither is the faculty—we've already met and we've all agreed—is that there will be no gambling in this school." I said, "I don't care if you're going to say, 'I was only watching,' I don't care. If you're there, you're guilty."

"The third thing is, you folks have your gangs or your groups or whatever. You (have) the Lincoln Wreckers and you (have) the Honomū (Boys). I don't know what you call yourselves." I said, "You stay where you are, keep to your corner—Waiākea corner, or whatever it is, Hakalau corner, Pāpa'ikou corner." I said, "I don't care. But you are responsible for that place now. (That includes) all the lockers in (that area). It's up to you to take care of them." I said, "Later on, we can get some paint, we'll let you come (on your own time) and paint your section and keep it nice and clean. But we're not going to stand for anybody marking up and (defacing your school). No graffiti."

I said, "Those are three things. Let's live together as a family. I'll put an extra door in my office. It's an open door that you can (use). You don't have to go to the secretary. (If) you want to see the principal, you come in (through that door). Just knock, if I'm busy with somebody, I'll come out and tell you; otherwise I'll (ask) you (to come) in. (We) want to try to keep this an open school and a school (that) we can be proud of."

I paddled (several) of (the) kids, including football players. They don't allow you to (administer corporal punishment anymore). But I didn't take them and bang their heads against a wall or—in any way, hit them with some heavy object or something. It was more to make them feel ashamed.

WN: So how much influence did those so-called gangs have?

LC: They were not destructive like (the "gangs") are now.

WN: Not the gangs that you hear about today?

LC: No, no. They did a few things, like (set off) firecrackers. What they would do is get a garbage can, they put firecrackers in (it) and light a long string. And so classes would start, then the firecrackers would go off.

So I told them, "From now on, that's your responsibility. I don't care who went over there and burned them. I don't care whether you're trying to tell me that, 'Oh, the Honomū gang did that.' Oh no, no, no. You take care of your own area."

When I first got there, the bell would ring, and everybody would go to their room. Then all of a sudden, from the *makai* building, kids (came) pouring down—(then from the) *mauka* building. I (asked) the secretary, "What's going on here? Where are these kids going?"

She says, "Oh, they're going to the auditorium to see movies on social studies."

I said, "Social (studies?)"

She said, "(Yes), today is sophomore social studies' (turn)."

I said, "Oh."

So I thought to myself, this doesn't make any sense. Why should the *makai* building be bothered when you got sophomore social studies?

So I counted the number of kids, figured it all out. And I figured that we could move all the sophomores (to) the first floor of the *mauka* building. There is a room jutting out (on) that (floor which) could be the teachers' resource center. We could (put) typewriters in (that room) and get the advanced typing kids to come there (to help the teachers prepare materials).

Another thing (that bothered me was that) kids, anytime during the day, would come to the office to get paper (supplies). "This [must] stop. Everything is going to go into (each) resource room, enough paper, duplicating materials, and (other items). You don't come and bother the secretary and the office staff, unless you do it during recess or some other time." We stopped all that nonsense.

(From time to time) I explained (proposed changes) to the faculty. After I talked to the curriculum committee—they were my bouncing board there. (I would recommend changes. The ideas were not all accepted,) but that's all right.

(Towards the end of the second semester we told the teachers), "We're going to have Operation Move House."

We had Operation Move House. And what we did was—all the teachers had already been told what rooms they were going to (move) to. We (also) told them, "You (are not to) take your filing cabinets (along) with you. You (have) a lot of storage in your (resource) room."

(A) teacher told me, "Oh, but I don't want to move out of my room down there."

I said, "Why?"

(She said), "Well, we bought the paint, and my students came one (Saturday) and we painted our classroom (since) the county didn't do it."

I said, "Look, I have no control over, (the county work crews). But what I would like to do is see your sophomore classes (in the *mauka* building. Then,) if you want to open up the doors"—there were (folding) doors between—"so you can have two classes together (to) hear a speaker. . . . Maybe a boy who graduated from Hilo High School comes back, he's a doctor. And he wants to tell you what it is to go through a college in the Mainland. (He can tell of) adjustments you have to make (if you leave Hawai'i. He can explain how) he finally ended up being a doctor, and what kind of courses he had to take. Your sophomore kids should be interested in that. If they haven't already planned (for their vocational choice) down (in) the elementary, it's not too late to work with them now.

So I said, "(By opening the folding doors) one teacher can then take care of the two classes if another teacher has to go someplace. Or you can show a movie in your class if it's only for sophomores and only your class (is involved. Why go to the large auditorium?)"

All of the sophomores were now on the first floor, then the juniors, and then the seniors on the top floor. And this way, we (had better cooperation at the various grade levels).

Another thing we (had) to do—I walked by the gymnasium, and I walked under the auditorium. (There) I (saw) papers and rubbish and some old desks from King Kamehameha's time, (desks) full of termites. I talked to the vice principal (and suggested that during Fire Prevention Week we could) have Operation Clean-up (on the) Friday afternoon, (that is,) after lunch. I (then) explained (the activity to Mr.) Kiyosaki. Each class would take care of their own section. We had certain boys, like the ag boys and other boys, (such as the) shop boys, (to) clean up (their) shops (and ag areas).

(After I went to the district office we did something similar.) The shop teachers from all the (high) schools (formed an organization to help each other upgrade their facilities. We used the spring break to have workshops and planned) summer workshops (with) DOE credit (during which we all pitched in to bring the various high school shops up to standards. Machinery was repaired, safety signs painted and curriculum content improved).

(We also) had an idea that we ought to change our structure of classes. Instead of having single classes, we (could) try some double classes. Like maybe math and science and so forth. . . . Especially, of course, in science, where you need a laboratory period. On Tuesdays and Fridays (were) the days when you (are) going to have your lab (periods). If your math class is a double period, too, maybe that's a day when (students) could construct their (models or) learning projects in math. In mechanical drawing, (double periods) could be (used for) building their (scale-model) homes (which) they had designed. (The scale models could be used in) an exhibit. All (these kinds) of things could be done. A class could go on a field trip, because now they would have two hours (to do so).

Brian Nakashima is now the (deputy) district superintendent for West Hawai'i. His father (Howard) was at Castle [High School]. He was telling me about a (program) where—they

were rearranging their classes so that the kids of different abilities would be together. In other words, if a sophomore could do senior work, why shouldn't he be taking classes with the seniors and then later on, take university-level classes? We had teachers (at Hilo High who) were able to (handle just such a program). I (asked) the PTA to give me some money (to use to look at the Castle High School program). I took five department heads to Honolulu to take a look at this. I rented a car myself, paid for my own expenses, (and we spent spring vacation at a workshop at Castle)."

We went to the workshop that they had during that spring vacation to see what this was all about. When we came back, I met with the five people that went with me and (asked), "Well, what do you think?"

They said, "You know, Mr. C, (we) don't think that this will go at Hilo High."

I said, "(Yes), I told you folks to talk about it, and then come and we'll meet when we get back."

So they said, "We wouldn't try that."

I said, "Fine."

So then a letter came to Kiyosaki that I had taken my teachers down (to) Honolulu, and I had gone down with them, and we had stayed at the hotel. So I had to go down and explain. "Hey, I paid my plane fare. I paid my own food. I rented the car. And we attended the workshop. The teachers got credit from the DOE for attending that workshop. As a result, we didn't try to force it on the rest of the teachers." And I said, "To me, that's a wise move instead of spending all that money and time and shaking up the whole school."

So he said, "Yeah." He laughed, "You're right."

I said, "You get a lot of these letters?"

He says, "Yeah."

By the end of my seven years there, I think I must have caused the district superintendents a lot of headaches.

WN: Like, who were the letters from?

LC: Oh, one was from a *wahine* over in Kohala. Another one was from another principal. And another one was from a community person. They'd hear rumors, I guess, and then they would write a letter to him. So when I would go down to see him, I (would) tell him, "Ralph, when I come in (to) see you, bring the other guys in here, you know, your assistants, your," what they call 'em, "curriculum specialists." I said, "Bring them in here. It's okay."

So one time, he called me and he said, "Hey, I got a letter. I'll send it to you. You look at it."

I met with my counselors, and we answered the letter. I answered, signed it, but I let them read it first. So we went down, we started discussing—this was about funds in the physical ed, athletic department. They said that—my son, (Frederick, who) was with me (for) one year, (transferred to Hilo High) from Honoka'a. He became one of two athletic directors. They split the work. (This was volunteer work. Athletic directors) didn't receive any pay in those days. And he or the other director would go with the team when the team played football (on) Maui—we were in the Maui league (at that time). And so this person wrote to Ralph and told him that Capellas was going to all the football games (on) Maui. And come to find out, my son was going. He didn't go to all of them, he went to half. The other guy went to the other half.

I said, "I did not appoint him as (one of the) athletic directors. The athletic committee, you can see (it) in their minutes, they are the ones that appointed him. He was athletic director at Honoka'a." I said, "I had nothing to do with it." This person also had said that I had made him a department head.

Right now, (Frederick is an instructor at) Sacramento City College. He was head of the business administration department, and then had a heart attack, so he (resigned as department head). He (is) a brilliant (young man). Up in California—I forget the name of the school right offhand—he was number two in his class, and I think he was about .02 percent below the number-one person when he went for his master's degree.

But what I'm trying to say is, at Hilo High, the principal does not appoint the department heads, not (while) I (was) there. The department gets together and they elect their chairman. And anytime they want to come and see me and tell me, "Hey, we want to have a meeting. We want to vote and get rid of the department chairman," I say, "That's perfectly all right." Because after all, (the department heads were only) given a lousy ten dollars (extra) a month. That (is) all (that) they were getting (for all of the responsibility and extra work.)

WN: Department chair, now, for which kind of department?

LC: Well, science, (math, social studies,) . . .

WN: Oh, school, in the school.

LC: School. All the departments—each department had a department head if they had five or more people under them, or with them, rather. They (also) got a period off (to serve on the curriculum committee).

WN: So one teacher is assigned to do that.

LC: (They were) an advisory group for the operation of the school. Just one of the things that they were responsible for was the purchasing of thousands of dollars worth of books, school (equipment and supplies). Throwing out courses that were (not productive and even) ancient. (They suggested) new courses, for which we had to get permission (to offer).

WN: Well, let's—we better stop.

LC: Yeah, okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 21-24-3-91

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Laurence J. Capellas (LC)

May 2, 1991

Honolulu, O'ahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Laurence Capellas on May 2, 1991, in Honolulu, O'ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, let's begin. Okay, so after Hilo High School—your principalship at Hilo High—you, in 1966, went over to the Hawai'i district office.

LC: (Yes.) In 1966, along with Bob Omura of the University [of Hawai'i], we wrote two projects for students. One was for intermediate school students who were potential dropouts. And we set that program up in Hakalau, then we got specially—teachers that were adapted [to] working with youngsters that were having problems adjusting to school. We had a shop (at Hakalau which we used. We (also) had a homemaking unit which we used. We got these kids to go through that. They were transported from Hilo to Hakalau.

WN: What were the age levels of the kids?

LC: Those were kids that were intermediate school age. At that time, Hilo High was [grades] ten to twelve. (These) problem kids were ninth graders. Because they were the biggest in the intermediate school, they would knock the other kids around. And by that time, they were getting kind of (too) hard core for intermediate school teachers to handle.

We thought of (using) the middle school concept. Sooner or later the (change to middle schools) was going to come (to Hawai'i). On my trips to the Mainland, I had seen (several) middle schools in operation. I suggested (that) we take these kids out (of Hilo Intermediate School). Eventually, Hilo High would be nine to twelve, and when that happened—which has (now) happened (since) Waiākea (High is a reality). The high school (can) better handle this type of kid. The intermediate school (setup) didn't have too much to offer.

We worked with those kids. Lunches (were) furnished by Kalaniana'ole School. We met with the parents first, and then the kids, to work out a way that we could get them back in the—as much as possible—back into the regular path that the other kids were taking, (a) normal school operation.

(This) was one project. It was called Hukilike. *Huki* in Hawaiian is to pull, and *like* is

everybody [i.e., together]. Everybody pulling together. We figured (that) the parents (pulling) together (with) kids and the teachers could (end up helping) the kids.

WN: So this is like a forerunner of the middle school concept?

LC: Well, that . . .

WN: Middle school was not . . .

LC: No, the middle school is what would have been left at the intermediate school. (Most) ninth-grade (students are) mature. They (don't) fit in a middle school. (The DOE still had to convince the taxpayers that) ninth graders should be shifted to the high school and that seventh and eighth be left (in what was) the intermediate school. They could do a better job at the (former) intermediate school without these bigger kids. Some of them, fourteen (and) fifteen (years old, were already) young men.

So Hukilike was that project, and it's still operating in Hilo. After (Hukilike) came (the) alternate school, which was (still) another concept.

Another project that we wrote up was Holomua. *Holomua* in Hawaiian means to forge ahead and to try to achieve your best in whatever you're doing. The idea of that [was] that it would be based on the (concept) of community education. (For example), if a girl says she wants to be a nurse, and we (already) knew that in the tenth grade, we would arrange—we could (then) give her a chance to visit the Hilo Hospital and have her actually (work) with a (registered) nurse, going from patient to patient (with the nurse), and wherever possible, be in an operating room (to learn as an observer—what is involved in such a career). (After the experience) she might say, "Oh (no), I don't want this. I see all this blood (and it upsets me)."

Or a young boy (may) want to be a dentist. The (plan then) would be to arrange with the dentist for him to go talk to the dentist, and then work with him in (his office). The dentist (could) give him a (great deal) of good advice about what school he could go to, how long it takes, what it costs and so forth.

And then those (youngsters) who wanted to be teachers would be (treated in) the same (manner. The project would arrange for them to get) into an intermediate or elementary school with a (cooperating) teacher who would (answer the many questions of the aspirant).

(Another) might be interested in becoming an engineer, so get him (or her) over to an engineer's office. And in the meantime, his teacher, who's teaching mechanical drawing or drafting, would be involved in this too. (The student could) actually work (maybe) two hours a day (in an area of engineering that appeals to him or her).

That Holomua is a good project. And there were federal funds for that. We wrote a project for three years. We went up to Oregon to the Northeastern (Education Center. We worked) with them (and) went to see (ongoing) projects.

In the meantime, of course, I was interested in getting federal (grants) and (other) federal

funds. (I had) heard about Title I at that time—now called Chapter I. I arranged to go (to) see Dr. Shuck, who was the superintendent of schools in—what's the name of that county where Las Vegas is? Clark County. I met him (at the) Clark County (airport for a short conference). In the meantime, he arranged for me to visit three schools there where he had helped write projects (and) got (much-needed) federal funds to help the kids. (Clark County was) able to get equipment with federal money to run (a) computer center (for training teachers). I was really interested in trying to get federal funds for all our schools to help kids. (The DOE) asked me if I would leave Hilo High—that was my seventh year [there]—and handle all the federal programs for the district, and that I would be working with the state. They had just hired somebody to handle (federal programs for the state. The new district position would include running CSAP.)

WN: What is that again?

LC: CSAP. Whether they still call it that. . . . C-S-A-P, yeah.

WN: Oh, okay. What does that stand for?

LC: I don't remember. We'll have to call the DOE.

Anyway, under that program, somebody was selected for (the) Kaua'i (district), somebody (for) Maui district, and so forth. We were told (federal) money (would be forthcoming). I was also to handle voc-tech—vocational-technical education—and also the project for (underachieving) youngsters. I wasn't going to be doing all the testing and everything, because we had a psychologist and everything to do that, but I would be trying to set up projects that could help—actually, not MREs but more or less underachievers. Based on that, we wrote our projects in (cooperation) with the teachers, and the schools were allotted funds. We also had district projects. In Hilo, we had a reading clinic. In August I was—August 1 I was transferred to the district office. I had to set up my own office (and did so in the District Office Annex).

WN: Was there a title? Was there a . . .

LC: Title I.

WN: Yeah, but was it filled before by somebody else?

LC: No, nobody.

WN: You were the first?

LC: I was the first.

We started planning for our reading clinic. We could have the kids bused in from schools. (The kids could walk from) Hilo Union School. (The other clients,) kids from Keaukaha and Kapi'olani, where they had a lot of low-income kids, and from Waiākea Elementary, (would be bussed in a sampan under contract). We (also) had some kids from Ha'aheo, just schools around the (Hilo) area.

We selected what normally now are called resource teachers. We brought a university professor from USC [University of Southern California], from the reading clinic there. We brought another professor from California, the northern part of California (Chico State). Both of these people ran workshops during the summer. The teachers that attended (the workshops) received credits (for a course in teaching reading skills).

For the first half of the training, we didn't (bring in) any youngsters. (During) the second half of the training, we had selected kids from the schools around that area who came (to participate in) a summer program. (The participants) were tested before and tested after to see what the best (approach to improve reading skills was. In the) meantime, we were collecting materials that we could use in this reading clinic. So once school started, we went at that thing full blast.

I was (also) working with the homemaking teachers, the auto shop teachers, the wood shop teachers, and the metal shop teachers, and (Title I programs). I had something to do with the cafeterias, because we had a (large amount) of surplus (federal) food coming in. That was kind of—doing about two guys' jobs, you know.

(Under Title I) we developed (a) project over in Kona, which we called Operation Live-in, which received national recognition. And we also had (a reading project) in Keaukaha. (The Keaukaha project) had national recognition. Our reading clinic (also received) national recognition. Every year they would take a look at projects that were exemplary, that could be copied, probably, by other schools (on) the Mainland and in (the other school districts in) Hawai'i.

That was kind of a real fun thing, because you could actually see these kids as they were improving. Some kids had different kind of handicaps, so we had to test them to find out what the problem was. They talked about things like what is dyslexia. The (youngster) is reading backwards. Because of projects like that, I think teachers became more alert and youngsters did better in school.

WN: Was there a lot federal money available, at that time?

LC: (Yes,) I think we had about one and a half million bucks coming in (to the Hawai'i district alone,) which was big money in those days, you know.

WN: And that's just for West Hawai'i?

LC: No, no, for the whole island of Hawai'i. (Yes,) but in West Hawai'i, that's where we had the dormitory, Operation Live-in. These kids lived in Miloli'i, and they'd get up early in the morning and change buses. By the time they got to school, they were half asleep. They had to change buses about four times to get to Kona Waena. The roads were not as good as they are now, and neither was the transportation (setup). Most of the kids from Miloli'i never even bothered to go to Kona Waena. A few did. (Their) parents really pushed them. Most of the parents were fishermen. (They would) come back from fishing at about two o'clock in the morning, then they'd get their fish and ice them down and drive all the way to Hilo, if they had a big catch. And while they were gone, of course, the kids didn't go to school. They had to take care of their younger brothers and sisters, the babies in the house. (On the return trip)

home from Hilo (they would haul ice). There was no place, at that time, that had an ice plant in Kona.

WN: So where did they live?

LC: They lived in a school building, 'Ala'ē School. We took the two-classroom building and we converted one part of it to a library and a study and the other (part) into a dormitory for the boys. These were only kids about third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, up to eighth grade. We had a man there with the boys. We used VISTA [Volunteers in Service to America] workers. We also had a VISTA worker over on the girls' side (in a teachers' cottage). Right across the street we had the *kupuna* idea, where this couple, Medeiros and his wife, came down and helped with the kids and told them Hawaiian legends and (gave them love and comfort).

The kids had a garden. We brought the parents up from Miloli'i and taught them how to cook low-fat foods and taught them how to sew. Because when you come right down to it, the cost of clothes, aloha shirts for little kids, is (a factor. We tried) to help them (to live within) their budget.

We got the kids to go to the dentist and (tried) to see that they got a better diet. The kids down Miloli'i, during certain times of the year, when the fish are not running as heavily as other times, (their families) don't have too much of an income. (If) they're on welfare, they'll be getting some money. (Miloli'i is) a hard place to raise vegetables. They didn't have (much) water. (Much of the time) their diet, unless they were able to afford poi, would be only fish and rice or something. This (alone is) not too good for your teeth. When (we started), one kid in the eighth grade (had lost almost all of) his teeth.

We got (the youngsters) to learn quite a bit, and their parents did, too. We had a good relationship. And the kids did well in school. I think I told you about that brag board over there. They had a big bulletin board. So a kid who was getting D's all of a sudden gets a C, boy, he puts it up on the brag board so everybody can see that he got a C. Or if they wrote a letter to some other kid in another school and the kid replied, they would put that up to show that they were improving. Or in their reading scores, when they got the report back from the school and they had improved in their math, (this was displayed. Our tutors helped in the) afternoon and in the evening, early in the evening. We brought the parents up for different kind of functions. We had movies, educational movies as well as recreational movies for them.

On Saturdays, the parents (usually) went fishing. (But if) they needed money for something, they would all go over to the mac[adamia] nut farms to (harvest) macadamia nuts. (On special occasions the dorm would) go to some hotel or restaurant. (This outing was used as a) learning (experience).

(A trip) to Honolulu (was another learning experience. At that time, many Kona homes) didn't have flush toilets. When they got in the airport, those kids (had fun) flushing the toilets. (Some) kids (had new) Keds (purchased for the trip). We took them to Honolulu for a

(few) days. (Visits were made) to Sea Life Park, to the zoo, (and) to the aquarium. (This) was an educational trip. They (also) went up to Bishop Museum. (The chaperones were their) parents and teachers. One of the teachers told me that they were walking down (at) Waikīkī, and they (saw some of) these kids walking back to the hotel. (The youngsters) had their rubber shoes hanging around their necks. They had tied the strings together. I guess their feet were sore, (as they were) not used to (wearing shoes).

WN: Was this done on other islands, too?

LC: Every island had their own projects. We (were) the only ones that had (a) live-in project. (I guess that is) why it received national recognition. Patsy Mink came (to visit the project as) we finished our first year. We had a big celebration, (including) a luau [*la'au*], and the kids (raised) their own sweet potatoes and (the parents contributed the fish). Chickens, bananas, rabbits, (and) ducks (were raised at the project). The McCandless Ranch (sold three bred heifers to the project. This hands-on experience was a fun type of project. There were bearing) avocado pear trees, (papayas and) bananas, (plus) vegetables (for the table). They could take (surplus) vegetables home if (they wished).

WN: That live-in program was at no cost to parents?

LC: No cost to parents. All they did was agree to have the child stay out at (the dormitory).

WN: And they would stay the whole week?

LC: They would come (on) Monday morning (and drop off) their clothes. (After) a little snack, get back on the bus and go on to Ho'okena School. We didn't take kids from the high school in there, because we didn't have enough room.

WN: Oh, this was elementary only?

LC: Elementary. Then we added the high school later, but not a big bunch, like two girls who helped supervise the younger kids and two boys (who helped) supervise the younger boys. The teachers (welcomed the help and in turn served as role models for the high schooler).

Miloli'i (usually) had (a shortage of) water. (The parents) would come up and use our water and our washing machines (in emergencies). That (really) was a good project.

I went from school to school, and we set up (special) classes in reading and math for the slower—underachievers, that's what they were. These kids are not dumb, they just needed somebody to work with them. They needed materials, so we (purchased) audiovisual aids, equipment, for each of the schools that were identified as schools having a certain number of underachievers. (Title I) was a good program. I stayed there [i.e., Hawai'i district office] for eleven years [1966–77].

WN: And did you—were you the one going up for the grants yourself?

LC: (Yes,) I had to write (most of) the grants. But if it was for a particular school, I would get the principal and the teacher in and we would write the thing together (in order to be sure) to

meet the federal standards. And if I needed help, I got it from the Honolulu office. (Personnel from the compensatory education section of the DOE) monitored projects and helped us with our financial computations and reports that were (required). There were certain no-nos in handling federal money. For example, Jerry Greer from that office helped us, (as did) Rose Yamada. Senator [Daniel] Akaka (worked in) that office for a period of time.

WN: You're a former—you're a principal used to administering a school, and then you switched—you know, switched gears, really. How you felt about that?

LC: Well, I think you (have to) try a little bit of everything in your lifetime. You can't just do the same thing over and over (again). Because no matter how old you get, you (will) still (be learning). When you stop learning, I think, you're going to be in sad shape. When I was teaching ag in Kaua'i, for example, years before that, I used to tell the kids, I said, "Boy, you've gotta try to do your best." I said, "If God gave you the power to be a good mathematician, you ought to be the best. If you have a good voice, and you can sing, or you're a good artist, you can paint." I said, "If you like to help heal people, then you ought to try to be a doctor or be a dentist or be nurse. But be the best. Always try to be the best." I said, "If you don't do better than your teacher, education is going backwards, not going forward, not improving."

I had a Dr. [George] Goto, who's a baby doctor. I had a Dr. [Henry Y.] Nakasone,—just give you examples—at the University of Hawai'i. (Henry) became a horticulturist. Andy Matsunaga was his brother's [Sen. Spark Matsunaga] office manager down here, and he was in (the insurance) business before that. So (yes), I think it's kind of fun (to be an educator).

Then, at the age of (sixty-three in) 1977 I was offered a job at the Hilo Vocational Rehabilitation Center [HVRC]. But I had to take the job by July 1. I already had forty-(two-plus) years of (state service. HVRC was in bad shape.) It was a mess. They were taking money from Peter to pay Paul. I was there for about three years. (While) there, I still was working (in an) education-(type operation).

WN: So you retired, then, in '77?

LC: I retired in '77, but I still stayed on (in the general field of education). I was with the Hawai'i County Economic Opportunity Council [HCEOC]. Some of the projects and the ideas that I had as a school administrator, we were using there and are still using.

For example, I operated the Head Start program. In fact, that was one of the jobs I inherited when I went to the district office, because the school department was handling the Head Start program. And so I helped with the program. We have a (school) dropout program. I don't know whether I told you this or not, but last year, for example, we had a hundred kids in our dropout program in the Hilo area. That's Hilo (High School) and Waiākea (High School. The potential dropouts are) referred to us by the parents, the teachers, and the principal of the school. These potential dropouts (normally) have been absent twenty days and (have poor) grades, drawing (D's and) F's. We hire our own counselors, we have our own teachers, and we work with these kids. And out of that hundred (referrals), ninety-eight kids stayed in school or came back to school, (and, more important, finished the year). First, we funded this (project) with federal funds. (That is), HCEOC did. Then we got the state (interested in)

funding (the operation).

At the same time in the Hilo area, seventy-five kids quit school. But they had not been referred to us, but these kids dropped out, which shows that the program can (succeed). The DOE can do certain things, but they can't do everything. Because they (have) a teachers' union that they (have to) deal with. Our people (can) work Saturdays, they (also) go to the homes, they drive a (van), whatever (is needed) to do to help (their students).

WN: So they're not government workers.

LC: No, but a lot of them are university graduates whom (HCEOC) trained. We have regular workshops. We bring in (professors) like Dr. Ikeda from the University [of Hawai'i at] Hilo, who's one of their (leaders) in the education department. We also have day-care projects, where we try to get the parents to go to work (while) we take care of their (youngsters). We also try to help (the parents) do a better job of taking care (of their own children).

And then we have a program called LAMP—Language Arts Multicultural Program. That LAMP program is still going on. And we now have a class, a (demonstration) class, here in Honolulu. (It) is being run in Kalihi. We (hired) a retired school principal, Mrs. Ruth Walker, to run that LAMP program. We (run training sessions using experienced) schoolteachers during periods (such as) spring vacation. (The) workshops (are for the) people that are in that program. We have an aide and a teacher in (each) LAMP (location).

The school gives us (underachievers) in the third or fourth grade (who) are having (difficulty in school). Maybe their parents don't have too much (of an) education or are immigrants. We put our teacher, who is a certified teacher, into the classroom with the regular teacher in that school. But she's subordinate to (the regular classroom) teacher. She only does what the other teacher tells her (to do. This presence is) only during the period (when the classes) have reading (or) math. Two periods (are used by our teachers and aides). Once they find out what skills are needed (to be worked on, our people work on the weaknesses after school).

After school, these (students) come to us. We give them a snack (and) have some type of recreation. (Then) we help them with their homework. We bring the parents in (and show) the parents how they can help their youngsters. We help them by giving them materials that they can develop. And they (observe classes) and go to some of (the) workshops. We take the kids home. By the time the kid gets home, it's about four-thirty (or) five o'clock. (Their homework has been completed. LAMP is) the only program that I can remember where kids actually run from the school to the project. Most of (the LAMP programs) are (held) in the school itself. We (do) have some classrooms (or areas that can be used after school. Two or three classes are operated in unused teachers' cottages.)

WN: And this is funded by . . .

LC: (A combination of) state, federal, (and) county funds.

WN: So it had no connection with the DOE in terms of funding.

LC: No, no. No funding from the DOE, other than that where they can provide space to help us,

they do. But we buy our own refrigerators to keep (refreshments. In some places we use stoves.) We may have to cook (or heat) food. Where the smaller kids are, like Head Start, day care, we actually fence in the (area for safety).

We rent a building, for example, from the Buddhist group in Kea'au. We rent a building—part of a building from the Episcopal church over in Ka'ū (for) one of our (HCEOC) projects. We have a principal's cottage in Ka'ū, at Pāhala, where we run the LAMP program. So we find space wherever we can.

Now, that project I was telling you about we're trying at 'Ala'ē. (HCEOC has) gotten that property from the state and the school department and (are) in the process of setting up a Head Start program there (as well as) a day-care program. (HCEOC is) repairing the building and getting the board of health and the fire department to approve the actual facilities (for the projects).

Just this past year, over in Kona, a Buddhist monk, a lady, wanted to give her Buddhist temple—a different sect of the regular Buddhist—to the state. She wanted somebody who would use the thing. She (did not) want to just leave it there. The place is worth at least a half a million (dollars. There is) a temple, and in the temple there (is) a basement all set up like an auditorium, and then a meditation building outside. There are facilities for whomever is going to live there, and also (is) a little apartment for somebody who would be staying there (overnight). It's a really nice area, (with) big parking space. She gave it to HCEOC, and we fenced (in) the whole (place).

Hawai'i County Economic Opportunity Council—I'm the president and board chairman—(is a non-profit, quasi-public community action program). The federal government gives us about \$238,000 a year (as operational funding. HCEOC generates additional funding averaging a grand total of \$4,000,000 per year. The low-income, handicapped, and elderly are covered by twenty-eight projects run by a staff of 140.)

WN: So that's now?

LC: Besides (operational funds), they give us money for the Head Start program. We get some federal funds because we transport elderly, handicapped, and low-income people. (We) take (our clients) to the doctors, take them shopping for their (food, to special events, to school).

We also buy (groceries) in bulk and deliver this to them. For example, if we got twenty older people in the community way over in Kohala, and if we can buy their rice for them at a big discount, or we can buy their canned goods at a big discount, we do. And then we deliver it to them, and they just pay for whatever amount they want. So we may be delivering cases of stuff. We buy at wholesale. And this way, you know, at least we know that they're going to have a fairly decent diet and care.

WN: So Hawai'i County Economic Opportunity Council is . . .

LC: That's right. (HCEOC is a community action program.)

WN: . . . part—how does that relate to the Hilo Vocational Rehab Center?

(Visitor arrives. Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay.

LC: You know, what I'm trying to tell you is that the DOE itself can take advantage of (these) kinds of programs, which (the DOE) cannot handle themselves (under their operational guidelines).

WN: So there's no duplication of that.

LC: No duplication. Instead of supplanting, (our projects) complement what they (are) doing, and I think that that's the key. We have too many agencies in the state right now that are trying to duplicate what the others are doing. The legislature got burned up, and [State House Finance Chairman] Joe Souki says, "We're paying out millions of dollars." One of the groups that wanted money to teach (playing the) guitar. What has the state got (to do with that)? I don't see that (as a taxpayer's responsibility).

WN: So Hawai'i County Economic Opportunity Council is part of the Hilo Vocational Rehab Center?

LC: No, no.

WN: It's two different things?

LC: Two different things. But we do transport their kids, the handicapped kids, for them in some cases.

WN: Oh, the Hilo Vocational Rehab Center is for handicapped kids?

LC: Yeah.

WN: Oh, I see.

LC: Handicapped kids and adults there.

WN: And you were there [HVRC] from '77-'80.

LC: Right. And while I was (director of HVRC) there, working with the state, we put up a new building for the rehab center. I made sure that we got the property (and) we got the funding. And we fenced the whole place in.

And then through UMTA, which is the [U.S.] Urban Mass [Transportation Administration], that's where (HCEOC is) getting buses now. We only pay 20 percent of the cost of the buses. (HCEOC has) about thirty buses, different sizes. We transport all over the island. And we transport the kids and their parents, for example, to Head Start, day care, different places. And we transport surplus foods from the federal government. We have about 12,000 low-income families on the Big Island. And we have about 4,000 families that we're dealing with all the time, either with their kids or (in some other manner). We train people for jobs. We (do) have a job training program.

We have twenty-eight projects, this Hawaii County Economic Opportunity Council. This is run by a tripartite board—low-income people, private sector, and the public sector. (Yes), I've been with them—this is my twenty-fifth year.

WN: So, you started there in sixty . . .

LC: I started there in '66.

WN: Sixty-six?

LC: (Yes.)

WN: I see. So while you were . . .

LC: While I was with the (district office).

WN: . . . you moved over to Hawai'i district office? [Beginning in 1966, LC worked for the DOE Hawai'i district office and as a volunteer from the DOE to the HCEOC at the same time.]

LC: (Yes), I was still (employed by the state). And the reason is, Ralph Kiyosaki (our district superintendent) was sitting on the board when they organized (HCEOC). It's something like your HCAP down here, Honolulu Community Action Program, or Maui's MEO [Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc.] or Kaua'i's KEO [Kaua'i Economic Opportunity, Inc.]. But ours is Hawai'i County Economic Opportunity Council.

WN: Were you compensated for this?

LC: No. No, I didn't get paid for that. I get a small amount of money, now, from Senator Akaka's office for expenses [as an Akaka staff worker]. But outside of that, my work has always been voluntary.

In the case of HCEOC, I've been able to go to some of their conferences (on) the Mainland for a week or so. But my wife and I make enough money. My two sons have good jobs. We're all right financially.

WN: Let me ask you some questions about your—you know, you spent forty-three years in the DOE, most of them as a principal, and you had a lot of—seems like you had a lot of free rein to do what you . . .

LC: (Yes.)

WN: . . . saw fit. And we already went through this part about. . . .

LC: (Laughs) Bending the school code.

WN: Right, right, right. Now, how has that changed today? Say, if you were a principal

today . . .

LC: Well, I think . . .

WN: . . . what difficulties would you encounter with your style?

LC: Well, I think that the only place where I would be restricted (is) the paddling of the youngsters. But I can tell you right now, I paddled them more to make them feel ashamed or just as a kind of a gentle reminder. I (was not) beating up kids every day, not like you see on TV. And I never took a kid and banged his head against the wall. I hit him where all the nerve centers started, where he sat. If he sat on his brains, (then paddling was effective).

(Laughter)

LC: When I was a kid, I was paddled.

WN: So all the way up to '66, you paddled?

LC: (Yes.)

WN: When you were a principal—and that was so-called legal?

LC: That's right. It was legal, (yes). And I had a witness, the school counselor was there. But it was only three whacks. And they knew that because I told them that at the first assembly at Hilo High School. And I told them at the first assembly that there would be no smoking. It's against the law. And besides, I had come from Pa'auilo where the school burnt down. I know what happens in a school (in that case).

After Pa'auilo School burnt down, (we had) a week to (reorganize and restart) school. The records were all burned, and we had to get buildings all over the place and arrange for meals to be cooked for those kids. And when it rained, some of those buildings leaked. I took kerosene stoves over there to try dry their clothes. (Yes), I think I had (many) interesting experiences.

WN: So paddling, then, would be the only thing that—I mean, as far as . . .

LC: As far as I know. One thing that I never was really too happy with in the DOE is the slow procedure in setting up a project. For example, that project Huki Like, where we went to work with these drop-outs. Now, what we're doing at HCEOC compliments that, our drop-out program. But the principals had agreed to the whole project, they had been briefed. And all the plans had been made for transporting the lunches. And the type of people we were going—we had interviewed the people. The kids were all set, ready to go. Come September, the DOE still had not approved—the money was approved, but the actual people that we were going to hire. And so, sometime in October when we had a kind of a showdown.

The trouble is, in the district you have a personnel man, right? In the state office, you (have a) personnel department. And then the state itself has its own personnel department. Why the heck do you have to go through three steps to get somebody? Then (the) reverse (takes place).

From the state to the DOE office, from the DOE office to the district office. What I'm saying is, there (are) some things that (should) be speeded up some way or other.

WN: Was it always slow like that?

LC: That's what it was when I was in there. And that's something that I couldn't buy. You (have) kids waiting now to go to school. What are they doing? Come September 1, all the other kids go to school, and these kids are—the parents are working. They must be around the streets someplace. And now with the fact that dope is a bigger problem than it was when I was principal, (it was) difficult to feel that you were doing the (best possible) thing for those kids. (We had) promised them something. When you promise a kid something, you better do it.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Is there a bigger discipline problem in the schools today than when you were principal?

LC: (Yes), I think that it's a little bit harder to manage a high school if you don't set the rules down with the kids. They understand what you as a teacher are going to be responsible for, what they're going to be responsible for.

I listened to a junior college teacher, or instructor, talking to his students, new students. I was there, just happened to be visiting. He told his students, he says, "You know, you and I are here for two things. The most important thing is that you get what you came here for, and I am the one that's supposed to help you get it. But I can't memorize something for you. You (have to) memorize it yourself. So if you don't, I'm here to help you as much as I can. But if you don't want to do your share—we work as partners (here)—then, I'm afraid you're in the wrong class. But," he says, "I'm willing to spend extra hours if necessary (to help you). I'm willing to teach at summer school or in the evenings, provided you do your part." He says, "That's all I'm asking. You do 50 percent, I'll do 50 percent. And if you do 50 percent, I might even do 60 percent. But you've got to show me that you came to school (with) certain goals and that you want to achieve them." He says, "I'm not going to chase you around. You're (an adult)."

WN: Whose job is it to discipline a child? The teacher's job? The principal's job?

LC: Well, I think that that all depends. I think that some schools have the vice principal handle all the discipline. But there are different kinds of discipline. But most of it can be handled by the teacher himself or herself, if he or she actually builds a good rapport with the youngsters. But the teacher has to want to teach and has to be happy about it. They used to say that the reason (many) kids were poor in math was because the elementary teacher couldn't do the math herself and really hated math anyway, never did care for it. Well, you can't teach if that's the case.

WN: So the teacher should be more than just somebody who knows the subject?

LC: That (is correct. The teacher has to) be somebody (who) cares for kids and is teaching not because her husband was transferred to Hilo from Honolulu, and she wants to do something and thinks she can teach school. Teacher[s] with all A's and doctor's degrees are not necessarily the best teachers. I think the teacher is (someone who) is really hard to describe. (Certain character traits are necessary that make him) want to teach and (be willing to take some "guff" along with the pleasure of accomplishments).

There are about five or six ways to skin a cat, you know. You can start at the tail, at the tip of his ear, or (somewhere) else. Same thing with problems, you know. You can try one way, second way, third way, fourth way, (and even a) fifth—different ways to work (a) problem. When I had---my teachers come in and tell me, "Oh, I got a problem."

I said, "(Do you have) any solutions (to suggest)?"

"No."

I said, "Look, think the problem over and come to me with three or four solutions, things that could be done." And I said, "You and I can (then) work together and decide which is the first, or the best, the second, or the third, and (end up with) what we will have to settle for." We (had) eighty-five teachers here in Hilo High School. I (could not) solve problems without the cooperation of the (other party). "Come with solutions."

I learned this from people like [Ralph] Kiyosaki and Ernest DeSilva, district superintendents who realized that you can't have a line outside of your door. People coming in, hoping that you're going to play God. You're not God. But if they come in with some solutions, you can (help to resolve a situation).

I remember one (teacher who) wanted me to do something in his classroom. Well, (we had) ninety classrooms, which are not all run at one time. (But) he tells me, "Hey, I talked to you yesterday about that job in my room, and you haven't done it yet."

I told him, "Look . . ."

He says, "First things first." (That was it) as far as he was concerned.

So I tried to tell him, "Look, if Mrs. Jones cannot lock her door, that's a hell of a lot more important than if there's a leak in your room, because you can put a bucket under it. But if she can't lock her door, she's (going to) worry (that) somebody (might) get into her room and cause a lot of damage. In fact, they could set fire to the whole building." I said, "We got to tackle things, emergency things, first, but (we will) get to your room. I told you I would do it, and I have it here on my list. As soon as we can, we'll do it. And if we can't get county help, we'll get our students from the shop to (help)."

At Hilo High School, everything was in filing cabinets. (When) they built the office building, they (included) a (large) vault. And the filing cabinets wouldn't fit in that vault, because one cabinet could fit in, but the second cabinet could not go on top of the first cabinet, if you wanted to stack them. And so what we did (was), I went to the seniors (in) their math class, and I explained to them what (the problem) was, and I asked for a team to come and help me.

I (said), "I just give you an idea, but I want you to work this out." I said, "What if we build a ladder—just giving you an idea—that had wheels so we could lift it up and move it? "One of the students gave me this idea, and I want to share it with you folks." I said, "What if you have a ladder so you could climb up here?" (LC draws diagram.)

WN: Climb up the side?

LC: Excuse me, up here. I made a mistake.

WN: What's that, the side?

LC: (Yes), this is an end of it. You shove this up against the wall, okay. We put stacks on (stacks). They all fit, one into the other, whichever (way) you want to. So (that where) a filing cabinet has (four drawers), you would have eight stacks (to represent two cabinets piggybacked. The portable steps would be used to get to the upper stacks.)

WN: Like a drawer.

LC: (Yes), like a (series of) drawers, (one on top of the other and eight high). I said, "I'm having a problem with (the ladder), but I think it can be worked out if you folks try to figure it out. When you're ready, we'll get the (aluminum) tubes, hollow tubes (to construct the ladder)." They use them for (conduits) when you're wiring a house. I said, "You five students volunteered, and your teacher says you're probably his most inventive youngsters."

Those kids went back and measured that (place again and) figured it all out. We took it up to the shop, we explained to the shop teacher in the metal shop what we wanted to do. He explained it to his students. They built the (ladder). We came back, we ordered these stacks, put them up, and they're still using this (system) at Hilo High School. We emptied twenty-eight filing cabinets (valued at \$2,800, and the teachers used the cabinets in their classes. The cabinets were) marked, like MB, *mauka* building, number six, or whatever the room (was. Some of the cabinets were) distributed among the feeder schools who (needed) filing cabinets.

Every Wednesday we had work day (at Hilo High School). The last period of the day, the ag boys would (deliver) hoes (and) rakes (to the office. The) first job (the detention group did was clear an area for the) new library. (We planned) to have the biggest (school) library in the state, bigger than the gym. And at the end of this (building), we (would) have the multi-purpose room, in which we had the audio-visual materials and all the trophies. The classes donated the filing cases (for Hilo High's trophies).

I told the (detention group), "This is what we're going to do here. You twenty boys, the reason you're here, you know, is that you cut class, you played hooky, or you (were) in some kind of trouble in your own room. One lousy boy stole tools from the shop. He stole about sixty-some-odd dollars worth of tools.

"The county (public works will) come in and survey (the area and draw) plans (for the new building). And our school department will then send them to Honolulu. (Contractors will) bid on this, and then we'll have a brand-new library. This is what the library is going to be like, so you folks will have a place where you can have your clubs meet or your class officers meet

on this, and then we'll have a brand-new library. This is what the library is going to be like, so you folks will have a place where you can have your clubs meet or your class officers meet and so forth. You can come in here to study (and) use some of the (audio-visual) machines that we have."

They knew what they were doing, and we had (very few) problems. I said, "While you folks are doing this, you're doing some good for the school. And you're doing some good for the students that are going to follow you. And so this is really not a punishment."

Then they said, "Well, why we have to work?"

You know, I said, "Look, I didn't get in any trouble, and I'm working."

Well, one kid, after he had come six times—that's the kid that stole the sixty-five dollars worth of tools—(was) told, "Well, today's your last day."

He said, "Can I stay longer?"

I said, "No, and don't you go stealing any more tools."

(Laughter)

LC: The joke is, these kids would start working, they would forget I was there. And they (would) start talking about (some) other kid, or this teacher. I would get a big kick, because they just figured I was one of them. They just ignored me.

(Laughter)

LC: But I think little things like that (help).

WN: Can they do that today? Can principals do that kind of punishment today?

LC: Why not? I don't see anything wrong with it. You're not giving them corporal punishment. You're not paddling them, the little darlings.

(Laughter)

WN: Couple more questions.

LC: Go ahead.

WN: First of all, what do you feel is not right about the school system today, if anything?

LC: Well, I may be wrong, but I think there isn't enough communication between what's going on in the DOE in Honolulu and the district office and the schools. I think there's better communication between the district office and the schools than there is if you're in the DOE itself and the schools or—and the teachers. I give you an example. When we became program specialists—we were educational specialists in the DOE, that was the title they gave us, okay.

In the district office, one of our people, (Mr. Shuichi) Tanaka, wrote pamphlets and illustrated them—and did most of it on his own time—to use in teaching science. The DOE said he (was) not supposed to be doing that. That (was) supposed to be done in the Honolulu office.

You (have) to pick the brains of anybody (who can help). In fact, I used to tell all my friends, "I'm here to pick your brains. If you're nice to me, I'll give you credit. But if you're not nice to me, I won't tell anybody. I'll tell them it's my idea." (Laughs)

But, we had (another curriculum specialist), Masui Ando. Masui Ando was a math resource teacher. She developed all types of pamphlets and (materials for teachers to use. The Honolulu office) told her the same thing, that that's not her job, she (was) not supposed to be working on materials, that the Honolulu office (would) do that. Hey, forget that nonsense. I think the best way to do (your job) is to work as a team and get the best possible product by using those that have the (best) skills.

WN: So you would favor a school/community-based management?

LC: I don't (actually) know what (that) is. I never bothered to sit down (and read material on it). But Ka'ū High School, the teachers, and the PTA, and the people in the community, yes, we ran the school.

(I would have heavy rains) in Pāhala during certain seasons, and those kids (in the *mauka* camps) couldn't go home once the gulches started to flood. We didn't have bridges all over. So we would have a rainy-day schedule, which meant no recesses, nothing, you know. But they could have some recreation—it wasn't loud or anything—in the rooms, so they would have breaks. But then we sent them home (early), because (if) you get a cloudburst, the water (would) run down (and even damage) the bridges (on the main highway). That place can really be something. Now, they have some control in there with Senator Akaka's (flood control bill).

Trying to get equipment for the school, if you wait for the DOE, you're going to wait forever. Because (a) small school, you only got so much per (student). So we used to run carnivals, but we tried not to interrupt the school's activities. And when we needed band instruments—we only needed about \$1,500 or \$2,000—we had fun night at the school, with all kinds of games at every one of the classrooms at the high school. And we had tickets and lucky numbers and had a lot of fun. (The cost per family was not very much), and we got donations from stores in Hilo and we gave away prizes. We raised (in) one (fun) night \$1,500. The PTA gave (the money) to us to buy band instruments and for (the) repair of some of the band instruments that we had.

I don't think you can wait forever for some things. While you're waiting, the kids that are there are losing out. And they got a right to (an) education and (access to) the best possible facilities and everything.

WN: So you're saying that, maybe, all this time, the neighbor island schools, especially, had what they call school/community-based management?

LC: Well, (many did).

WN: Seems like you're describing—when you describe all the schools that you taught at and everything, seems like it's exactly what they're calling for now, you know, or they're trying to implement now.

LC: Well, I started teaching over fifty years ago. And when I first started teaching, my dad, who had been in the business a long time, told me that there's a circle that just goes round and round. In other words, certain things that you are teaching and certain ideas that you have may not be accepted right at that point, but later on, little by little, they'll filter down. And then later on when you look at it, you'll say, "Hey, we were trying to do that ten years ago." Or, "We used to do that twenty years ago."

WN: So everything is cyclical, yeah?

LC: Yes, it actually (is). This is 1991. Schools were doing stuff like that.

WN: Okay. Well, I asked you what's wrong. What's good about the public school system today?

LC: Well, I think that, little by little, people are realizing that public schools do a good job. I went to a class reunion of Ka'ū High School kids that graduated in 1948. And two years ago, they celebrated their fortieth. This class invited me to go and we went to Kona. And I talked to the kids. And I asked them what they were doing. And they also talked to the other kids, when we got together, about what they were doing. One fellow was a space engineer. Ka'ū High School, you know. So you can be proud of a little school like that. Only ninety boys in the whole high school.

We had a girl who's running a modeling agency. We had a fellow who was a stunt man. He was a terrific athlete at school. He had his own group, his own company, doing stunts. And he mentioned some of the people that he hired in his operations. There were quite a few who were either principals, doctors, and so forth. And just in this small class, you know. And I was thinking to myself, "Gee, engineers. . . ." In fact, my son was in that class, too. Look, he's a deputy county engineer on the Big Island. And one of his classmates is the divisional engineer.

Then some of the girls, they had their own businesses. It was really amazing what they were doing and how they had done well. One fellow was a deputy district superintendent of schools in a school district. I forget—I don't remember offhand, you know, where he was, but. . . . And these are kids I had in Little League baseball, kids that played on the football team. And you can see that if you want to, there's nothing in this world that you can't do.

My grandfather told me, "Boy, you want to dig a tunnel, go ahead and dig it. If you find a rock, you gotta dig it out. You're gonna have a hard time. Remember, there are other rocks there just as big, so don't give up. You gotta keep going until you see the light at the end of the tunnel. When you see that light, then you know that you're gonna make progress and you're gonna go. If you can think of anything—if a man can think of anything, it can be done."

You remember Jules Verne, I told you that—that always comes to mind, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. Look what we're doing now. Yeah, it's wonderful to be alive, you know. I'd be happy to be born again. Little minor problems that we have, at the moment, you think they're something great, but, boy, this life is worth living. That's why I can't understand—I had a girl come in my office at Hilo High School. And she was brought in by the counselor because she wanted to kill herself. I think she was about fifteen. Because she had had a fight with her boyfriend and with her parents and everything else, she tried to take pills to kill herself.

And so I told her, I said, "You know, I'm"—I forget how old I was then. I guess I must have been about sixty. I said, "How old are you?"

She says, "Fifteen."

I said, "I'm sixty. I've been in this world four times as long as you. I would be happy to exchange with you. If you're going to live for another forty-five years—if God will give me the forty-five years to live, and I go back and study and be like you in the tenth grade and work my way up, and I don't have to remember all the things that I know now." I said, "But you take my place, you take my salary. And you don't have to stay here, you can be any kind of job, whatever you want to do." I said, "I'd be happy. Life is so wonderful, it doesn't pay to kill yourself. It's not going to solve any problems."

You know, I talked to her for a long time. She finally graduated from school. Maybe I had a little bit to do with it. If I see her on the street now, with her kids and all, she always—"How are you Mr. Capellas?" and everything. I think she realizes as she gets older that that rock is nothing compared to life itself.

Well, life is worthwhile. And teaching is a wonderful game. Boy, it's the best game. You know, Buddha taught, Christ taught. All the (other) great people in the world—Mohammed (for example, were) all teachers.

WN: And Capellas, too?

LC: (Three generations of the Capellas family, fourteen members in all, have accumulated 430 years of service as educators. Three of the fourteen are still teaching. In 1988 the Capellas family received the Family of Educators Award from the Hawai'i State Retired Teachers Association.)

WN: Well, that's a good place to end. Thank you very much for your time.

END OF INTERVIEW

PUBLIC EDUCATION IN HAWAI'I Oral Histories

Volume I

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

September 1991



"On Wings of Discovery"
Ka Ho'ike Ma 'Iolani